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925

Martineau

Social—  
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*Harriet*  
THE GREAT SIN

P32

OF

GREAT CITIES.

*Harriet*  
*by Miss Harrison.*

BEING A REPRINT,

BY REQUEST,

OF AN ARTICLE, ENTITLED "PROSTITUTION,"

FROM THE WESTMINSTER AND FOREIGN QUARTERLY REVIEW,

FOR JULY MDCCCL.

*Wish to attribute this  
to Herbert Spencer.*

LONDON:

JOHN CHAPMAN, 142, STRAND.

M.DCCC.LIII.

9 April, 1892.

The Gift of  
JOHN H. MORSE, Esq.

## PROSTITUTION.\*

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THERE are some questions so painful and perplexing, that statesmen, moralists, and philanthropists shrink from them by common consent. The subject to which the following pages are devoted, is one of these. Of all the social problems which philosophy has to deal with, this is, we believe, the darkest, the knottiest, and the saddest. From whatever point of view it is regarded, it presents considerations so difficult and so grievous, that in this country no ruler or writer has yet been found with nerve to face the sadness, or resolution to encounter the difficulties. Statesmen see the mighty evil lying on the main pathway of the world, and, with a groan of pity and despair, "pass by on the other side." They act like the timid patient, who, fearing and feeling the existence of a terrible disease, dares not examine its symptoms or probe its depth, lest he should realise it too clearly, and possibly aggravate its intensity by the mere investigation. Or, like a more foolish animal still, they hide their head at the mention of the danger, as if they hoped, by ignoring, to annihilate it.

It is from a strong conviction that this is not worthy behaviour on the part of those who aspire to guide either the actions or the opinions of others, that, after much hesitation and many misgivings, we have undertaken to speak of so dismal and delicate a matter. We are aware that mischief is risked by bringing the subject prominently before the public eye, and that the benefit to be derived from the discussion should be so clear and certain, as unquestionably to overbalance this risk. We are aware that it is a matter on which it is not easy to speak openly—not always possible to speak with confidence as to facts, causes, or consequences; we are aware that we shall expose ourselves to much scoffing from the vulgar and light-

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- \* 1. *De la Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris.* Par Parent-Duchatelet.
  2. *Miseries of Prostitution.* By James Beard Talbot.
  3. *Prostitution in London.* By Dr. Ryan.
  4. *Letters in the Morning Chronicle—Metropolitan Poor.*



minded ; much dishonest misrepresentation from those who recklessly echo any popular cry ; much unmerited anger from those who deem that refinement forbids them to speak of things which it does not forbid them to do ; much serious blame on the part of those who think that no object can justify us in compelling attention to so revolting a moral sore. We have weighed all these obstacles ; and we have concluded that the end we have in view, and the chance of the good we may effect and the suffering we may mitigate, warrant us in disregarding them. We think that such considerations have already too long withheld serious and benevolent men from facing one of the sorest evils that the English sun now shines upon. Our divines, our philanthropists, our missionaries, nay, even our *sœurs de la charité*, do not shrink from entering, in person, the most loathsome abodes of sin and misery,—or from penetrating into the lowest dens of filth and pollution, where human despair and degradation ever dragged itself to die,—when led thither by the impulse of compassion and the hope of good. Why, then, should we allow indolence, disgust, or the fear of misconstruction, to deter us from entering upon an inquiry as to the possibility of mitigating the very worst form which human wretchedness and degradation can assume ? The best and purest of our race do not feel themselves repelled from, or tarnished by, the darkest haunts of actual guilt and horror, where pain is to be assuaged, or where souls are to be saved. Let us act by *subjects*, as they act by *scenes*.

Feeling, then, that it is a false and mischievous delicacy, and a culpable moral cowardice, which shrinks from the consideration of the great social vice of Prostitution, because the subject is a loathsome one ;—feeling, also, that no good can be hoped unless we are at liberty to treat the subject, and all its collaterals, with perfect freedom both of thought and speech ;—convinced that the evil must be probed with a courageous and unshrinking hand before a cure can be suggested, or palliatives can safely be applied ;—we have deliberately resolved to call public attention to it, though we do so with pain, reluctance, and diffidence.

And, first—to preclude misrepresentation, as far as this is possible—we must show our colours by expressing our own feelings as to fornication. Our morality will be considered by the divine as strangely lax and inconsistent, and by the man of the world, the ordinary thinker, and the mass who follow current ideas without thinking at all—as savage and absurd ; nevertheless, we conceive it to harmonize with the ethics of nature and the dictates of unsophisticated sense. We look upon fornication, then (by which we always mean promiscuous intercourse with women who prostitute themselves for pay), as the worst and lowest form of sexual irregularity, the most revolting to the unpolluted feelings, the most indicative of a

low nature, the most degrading and sapping to the loftier life,—

“The sin, of all, most sure to blight,—  
The sin, of all, that the soul’s light  
Is soonest lost, extinguish’d in.”

Sexual indulgence, however guilty in its circumstances, however tragic in its results, is, when accompanied by love, a sin *according to nature*; fornication is a sin *against nature*; its peculiarity and heinousness consist in its divorcing from all feeling of love that which was meant by nature as the last and intensest expression of passionate love; in its putting asunder that which God has joined; in its reducing the deepest gratification of unreserved affection to a mere momentary and brutal indulgence; in its making that only one of our appetites, which is redeemed from mere *animality* by the hallowing influence of the better and tenderer feelings with which nature has connected it, *as* animal as all the rest. It is a voluntary exchange of the passionate love of a spiritual and intellectual being, for the mere hunger and thirst of the beast. It is a profanation of that which the higher organization of man enables him to elevate and refine. It is the introduction of filth into the pure sanctuary of the affections.

We have said that fornication reduces the most fervent expression of deep and devoted human love to a mere animal gratification. But it does more than this: it not only brings man down to a level with the brutes, but it has one feature which places him far, far below them. Sexual connexion, with them, is the simple indulgence of a natural desire *mutually felt*: in the case of human prostitution, it is in many, probably in most instances, a brutal desire on the one side only, and a reluctant and loathing submission, purchased by money, on the other. Among cattle the sexes meet by common instinct and a common wish; it is reserved for the human animal to treat the female as a mere victim for his lust. The peculiar guilt of prostitution, then, consists, in our view of the matter, in its being *unnatural*; a violation of our truer instincts—not a mere frailty in yielding to them. On this matter, therefore, we feel at least as strongly as any divine can do.

In the second place, we feel called upon to protest against the manner in which prostitutes are almost universally regarded, spoken of, and treated in this country, as dishonouring alike to our religion and our manhood. This iniquity pervades all classes, and both sexes. No language is too savage for these wretched women. They are outcasts, Pariahs, lepers. Their touch, even in the extremity of suffering, is shaken off as if it were pollution and disease. It is discreditable to a woman even to be supposed to know of their existence. They are kicked, cuffed, trampled on with impunity by

every one. Their oaths are seldom regarded in a court of justice, scarcely ever in a police court. They seem to be considered far more out of the pale of humanity than negroes on a slave plantation, or fellahs in a pasha's dungeon. We shall all recognise the truth of the following picture :—

“Women whose poverty drives them to sin against religion and morality—prostitutes for bread—are regarded with that sort of scorn which a Turk expresses when he says ‘Dog of a Christian!’ The English show profound respect for their devil, in comparison of the way in which they treat their women of the town. For these, such epithets as wicked, vile, nasty; such terms as slut, strumpet, wretch, are too good. You must not mention them at all in public; you cannot allude to them in a book without staining your pages. Recommend that they should be treated like fellow-creatures, as in the Netherlands, and if you are not prosecuted for blasphemy, many will say that you deserve to be hanged. In America or Holland, if you strike a woman of this class, she will take the law of you: in England her evidence might be rejected, or at all events would not be believed: ‘Gentlemen of the Jury,’ the counsel for the accused would say, ‘this charge rests on the evidence of a common (meaning poor) prostitute. laugh! my respectable (rich) client is already acquitted.’ I do not pretend that such a speech was ever made; but I assert (admitting the hypothesis to be absurd) that if by chance a respectable Englishman was prosecuted for assaulting a woman of the town, then this would be the way to get him acquitted. The English constitution recognizes parish apprentices, but not prostitutes. Prostitution is one thing, the prostitutes another. The laws and customs of England encourage prostitution, but do not even protect the prostitutes. The laws and customs of England combine to sink this class of Englishwomen into a state of vice and misery beyond that which necessarily belongs to their condition. Hence their extreme degradation, their troopers’ oaths, their love of gin, their desperate recklessness, and the shortness of their miserable lives.”\*

If the *extremity* of human wretchedness—if a condition which combines within itself every element of suffering, mental and physical, circumstantial and intrinsic—is a passport to our compassion, every heart should bleed for the position of an English prostitute, as it never bled at any form of woe before. We wish it were in our power to give a picture, simple, faithful, uncoloured, but “too severely true,” of the horrors which constitute the daily life of a woman of the town. The world—the unknowing world—is apt to fancy her reveling in the *enjoyment* of licentious pleasures; lost and dead to all sense of remorse and shame; wallowing in mire because she loves it. Alas! there is no truth in *this* conception, or

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\* ‘England and America,’ vol. i. p. 74.

only in the most exceptional cases. Passing over all the agonies of grief and terror she must have endured before she reached her present degradation; the vain struggles to retrieve the first false, fatal step; the feeling of her inevitable future pressing her down with all the hopeless weight of destiny; the dreams of a happy past that haunt her in the night-watches, and keep her ever trembling on the verge of madness;—passing over all this, what is her position when she has reached the last step of her downward progress, and has become a common prostitute? Every calamity that can afflict human nature seems to have gathered round her,—cold, hunger, disease, often absolute starvation. Insufficiently fed, insufficiently clad, she is driven out alike by necessity and by the dread of solitude, to wander through the streets by night, for the chance of earning a meal by the most loathsome labour that imagination can picture, or a penal justice could inflict. For, be it remembered, desire has, by this time, long ceased; the mere momentary excitement of sexual indulgence is no longer attainable; repetition has changed pleasure into absolute repugnance; and these miserable women ply their wretched trade with a loathing and abhorrence which only perpetual semi-intoxication can deaden or endure. The curses, the blows, the nameless brutalities they have to submit to from their ruffianly associates of the brothel and saloon, are as nothing to the hideous punishment inherent in the daily practice of their sin. Their evidence, and the evidence of all who have come in contact with them, is unanimous on this point—that gin alone enables them to live or act; that without its constant stimulus and stupefaction, they would long since have died from mere physical exhaustion, or gone mad from mental horrors.\* The reaction from the nightly excitement is too terrible to be borne, and gin is again resorted to as a morning draught. Even this wretched stimulus often fails; and there can be few of our readers who have not seen some of these unhappy creatures, after a winter's night spent in walking wearily to and fro for hours, amid snow, frost, or piercing winds, in dress too flimsy even for the hottest season, sink down upon a door-step, fainting and worn out; too feeble to be able, and too miserable to desire to rise. All this time, too, disease of many kinds is busy with its victim; and positive pain is added to severe privation and distracting thought. Do not let it be supposed that

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\* The evidence of all these poor girls is unanimous on this point. "No girl could lead the life we do without drink," is the common expression. (See the Letters in the *Morning Chronicle*, Letter XXIX. especially).

they are insensible to the horrors of their situation ;\* we believe this is rarely the case altogether ; where it is so, they owe it to the spirits in which they invariably indulge.

\* "Si on n'examine les prostituées que dans les rues et dans l'exercice de leur métier ; si on ne fait attention qu'à leur ton, à leur impudeur, et aux mots lubriques qui sortent de la bouche de quelques unes, on pourrait croire qu'elles considèrent ce métier comme un autre, qu'elles n'ont pas pour lui de l'antipathie, et que peu s'en faut qu'elles ne s'en fassent un titre de gloire. . . . Mais ce n'est pas dans ces circonstances que l'on peut étudier le cœur et l'esprit de ces femmes ; c'est en prison, dans leurs moments de peines et de souffrances ; c'est surtout lorsqu'on a su, par de bons procédés, s'attirer leur confiance, que l'on découvre ce qui se passe dans leur âme, et combien est pesant pour elles le poids de leur ignominie. . . . Elles connaissent toute leur abjection, et en ont, à ce qu'il paraît, une idée bien profonde ; elles sont à elles-mêmes un sujet d'horreur ; le mépris qu'elles ont pour elles dépasse souvent celui que leur portent toutes les personnes vertueuses ; elles regrettent d'être déchues, elles font des projets, et même des efforts pour sortir de leur état ; mais tous ces efforts sont infructueux, et ce qui les désespère, c'est de savoir qu'elles passent, dans l'esprit de tout le monde, pour la fange et la boue de la société. . . . En effet, qui pourrait souffrir sans effroi, sans trouble, et sans abattement, l'oubli général des hommes, et à plus forte raison leur haine, leur mépris, et leur universel dédain ? La seule pensée de cet état a fait tomber plusieurs prostituées dans l'aliénation mentale. . . . Quelques traits acheveront de donner une idée de cette particularité du caractère des prostituées. Lorsqu'on les mit à la Pitié, il n'y avait pas de chapelle dans leur division ; on y érigea enfin un autel, ce qui fit sur elles l'impression la plus vive, et les combla de joie. Croirait-on que ce fut par un sentiment de religion ?—non assurément ; c'était, pour me servir de leur expressions, parcequ'on ne les considérait plus comme de chiens, et qu'on faisait autant pour elles que pour les autres. Un médecin n'entrait jamais dans leur salles sans ôter légèrement son chapeau ; par cette seule politesse, il sut tellement conquérir leur confiance, qu'il leur faisait faire tout ce qu'il voulait ; et que l'ordre le plus parfait régnait dans ses salles ; ce qui n'avait pas lieu dans celles d'un autre médecin qui affectait à leur égard le dédain le plus grand."—Duchatelet, vol. i. p. 108.

The sensitiveness of these unhappy creatures to their situation, and the crushing sense of degradation which clings to them throughout, in spite of their meretricious ornaments, their frightful language, and their hollow laughter, seem to us such an important point to establish, in order that the world may form a just estimate of their condition, that we must quote one more testimony. The original MS. from which the following lines are taken, was discovered, by the medical man who attended her on her death-bed, among the papers of a poor penitent prostitute, who died of want in a garret in Glasgow.

The following, though in a work of fiction, is a faithful picture of the feelings of thousands of these poor wretches :—

“ ‘And now listen to me, Esther. You loathe the life you lead, else you would not speak of it as you do. Come home with me ; and tomorrow I will see if some honest way of living cannot be found for you. Come home, I say.’

“ ‘I tell you, I cannot. I could not lead a virtuous life if I would. I should only disgrace you. If you will know all,’ said she as he seemed inclined to urge her, ‘I must have drink. Such as live like me, could not bear life without drink. It’s the only thing to keep us from suicide. If we did not drink, we could not stand the memory of what we have been, and the thought of what we are, for a day. If I go without food, and without shelter, I must have my dram. Oh ! you don’t know what awful nights I have had in prison, for want of it,’ said she, shuddering, and glaring round with terrified eyes, as if dreading to see some spiritual creature, with dim form, near her.

“ ‘It is frightful to see them,’ whispering in tones of wildness, although so low spoken. ‘There they go, round and round my bed, the whole night through. My mother, carrying little Annie (I wonder how they got together), and Mary—and all looking at me, with their sad, stony eyes. Oh ! Jem, it is so terrible. They don’t turn back, either, but pass behind the head of the bed, and I feel their eyes on me every-

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“ VERSES FOR MY TOMBSTONE, IF EVER I SHOULD HAVE ONE.

“ The wretched victim of a quick decay,  
Relieved from life, on humble bed of clay,  
The last and only refuge from my woes,  
A love-lost, ruined female, I repose.  
From the sad hour I listened to his charms,  
And fell, half forced in the deceiver’s arms,  
To that, whose awful veil hides every fault,  
Sheltering my sufferings in this welcome vault,—  
When pampered, starved, abandoned, or in drink,  
*My thoughts were racked in striving not to think ;*  
Nor could rejected conscience claim the power  
To claim the respite of one serious hour.  
I durst not look to what I was before ;  
My soul shrank back, and wished to be no more.  
Of eye undaunted, and of touch impure,  
Old, ere of age—worn out when scarce mature ;  
Daily debased to stifle my disgust,  
Of forced enjoyment in affected lust ;  
Covered with guilt, infection, debt, and want—  
My home a brothel, and the streets my haunt.  
For seven long years of infamy I’ve pined  
And fondled, loathed, and preyed upon mankind ;  
Till the full course of sin and vice gone through,  
My shattered fabric failed at twenty-two.”

where. If I creep under the clothes, I still see them ; and, what is worse,' hissing out her words, with fright, 'they see me. Don't speak to me about leading a better life. I must have drink. I cannot pass to-night without a dram—I dare not.'

"Jem was silent, from deep sympathy. . . . 'Stay a minute,' said he, as she was on the point of departure. 'I may want to speak to you again. I must know where to find you. Where do you live?'

She laughed strangely. 'And do you think one sunk so low as I am, has a home? Decent, good people have homes—we have none. No; if you want me, come at night, and look at the corners of the streets about here. The colder, the bleaker, the stormier the night, the more certain you will be to find me. For then,' with a plaintive fall in her voice, 'it is so cold sleeping in entries, and on door-steps; and I want a dram more than ever.'"

The career of these women is a brief one; their downward path a marked and inevitable one; and they know this well. They are almost never rescued; escape themselves they cannot. *Vestigia nulla retrorsum*. The swindler may repent, the drunkard may reform; society aids and encourages them in their thorny path of repentance and atonement, and welcomes back with joy and generous forgetfulness the lost sheep and the prodigal son. But the prostitute may *not* pause—*may NOT recover*: at the very first halting, timid step she may make to the right or to the left, with a view to flight from her appalling doom, the whole resistless influences of the surrounding world, the good as well as the bad, close around her to hunt her back into perdition.

Then comes the last sad scene of all, when drink, disease, and starvation have laid her on her death-bed. On a wretched pallet in a filthy garret, with no companions but the ruffians, drunkards, and harlots with whom she had cast in her lot; amid brutal cursés, ribald language, and drunken laughter; with a past—which, even were there no future, would be dreadful to contemplate—laying its weight of despair upon her soul; with a prospective beyond the grave which the little she retains of her early religion lights up for her with the lurid light of hell,—this poor daughter of humanity terminates a life, of which, if the sin has been grievous and the weakness lamentable, the expiation has been fearfully tremendous.

We have seen that even in their lowest degradation these poor creatures never wholly lose the sense of shame or sensitiveness to the opinions of the world. It is pleasing also to find that another of the chief virtues which belong to the female character, seems never to become extinct with them or even to be materially impaired. Their kindness to each other, when sick or destitute, and indeed to all who are in suffering or distress, has attracted the attention and

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\* 'Mary Barton,' vol. i. p. 258.

called forth the admiration of all who have been thrown much into contact with them. "The English Opium Eater" bears eloquent testimony to the unquenchable tenderness of their nature, and the ready generosity with which they lavish aid to the needful out of their scanty and precarious means. Duchatelet states that their affection for children, whether their own or not, is carried to a point surpassing that common to women, and that, in consequence, they make the most careful and valuable of nurses. Furthermore, he tells us:—

"Un des caractères distinctifs des prostituées est de se secourir et de s'entr'aider dans leurs peines et leurs malheurs. Si l'une d'elles tombe malade, toutes les autres sont à l'instant désolées, elles s'empressent de lui procurer tous les secours dont elle a besoin, elles la conduisent à l'hôpital, et viennent régulièrement la visiter.

"Il faut voir dans la prison avec quel empressement se font les conversations pour fournir un vêtement ou des chaussures à celles qui doivent sortir, et qui se trouvent dans une nudité absolue; elles se depouillent elles-mêmes de ce qui leur est nécessaire, quoiqu'elles sachent souvent que les personnes qu'elles secourent les ont plusieurs fois trompées, et qu'elles n'ont pas à en attendre de reconnaissance.

"Cette particularité du caractère des prostituées est générale et constante. . . . Ce caractère généreux, qui les rend prodigues de tout ce qu'elles ont, les porte souvent à secourir des gens étrangers à leur classe, mais qu'elles savent dans le besoin. On m'a cité et fait remarquer un grand nombre de filles qui ont fourni, dans des temps difficiles, un pain par semaine, et quelquefois par jour, à des vieillards, à des infirmes, ou à des familles nombreuses qui demeuraient dans leur voisinage."—Vol. i. p. 144.

A very touching instance of these amiable feelings was related to us a short time ago. A poor girl who, after a few years spent in infamy and wretchedness, was rapidly sinking into a decline, had still no means of livelihood but in the continued practice of her calling. But, with a mixture of kindness and of conscience which may well surprise us under such circumstances, her companions in degradation resolved among themselves that, as they said, "at least she should not be compelled to die in sin," and contributed out of their own poor and sad earnings a sufficient sum to enable her to pass her remaining weeks in comfort and repentance. This is not a trait of the wholly lost.

But if sympathy be due to these unhappy women on the mere ground of the sufferings they undergo, it will perhaps be even more readily rendered when we examine a little into the antecedents which have led them to their fate. There is, we think, a very general misapprehension, especially among the fair sex, as to the original causes which reduce this unfortunate class of girls to their state of degradation—the primary circumstances of their fall from chastity. On this matter, those who know the most will assuredly



judge the most leniently. Those who think of this class of sinners as severely as closet moralists, and voluptuaries with filthy fancies and soiled souls, and—alas! as most women are apt to do—fancy the original occasion of their lapse from virtue to have been either lust, immodest and unruly desires, silly vanity, or the deliberate exchange of innocence for luxury and show. We believe they are quite mistaken: it is the first *never*, or so rarely, that in treating of the subject we may be entitled to ignore the exceptions; it is the latter only in a small proportion of the cases that occur. It is very important to a true view and a sound feeling on these matters, to set this error right. Women's *desires* scarcely ever lead to their fall; for (save in a class of whom we shall speak presently) the desire scarcely exists in a definite and conscious form, till they *have* fallen. In this point there is a radical and essential difference between the sexes: the arrangements of nature and the customs of society would be even more unequal than they are, were it not so.

In men, in general, the sexual desire is inherent and spontaneous, and belongs to the condition of puberty. In the other sex, the desire is dormant, if not non-existent, till excited; always till excited by undue familiarities; almost always till excited by actual intercourse. Those feelings which coarse and licentious minds are so ready to attribute to girls, are almost invariably *consequences*. Women whose position and education have protected them from exciting causes, constantly pass through life without ever being cognizant of the promptings of the senses. Happy for them that it is so! We do not mean to say that uneasiness may not be felt—that health may not sometimes suffer; but there is no consciousness of the cause. Among all the higher and middle classes, and, to a greater extent than would commonly be believed, among the lower classes also, where they either come of virtuous parents, or have been carefully brought up, this may be affirmed as a general fact. Were it not for this kind decision of nature, which, in England, has been assisted by that correctness of feeling which pervades our female education, the consequences would, we believe, be frightful. If the passions of women were ready, strong, and spontaneous, in a degree even remotely approaching the form they assume in the coarser sex, there can be little doubt that sexual irregularities would reach a height, of which, at present, we have happily no conception. Imagine for a moment, the sufferings and struggles the virtuous among them would, on that supposition, have to undergo, in a country where, to hundreds of thousands, marriage is impossible, and to hundreds of thousands more, is postponed till the period of youth is passed; and where modesty, decency, and honour, alike preclude them from that indulgence which men practice without restraint or shame. No! Nature has laid many heavy burdens on the delicate

shoulders of the weaker sex: let us rejoice that this at least is spared them.

The causes which lead to the fall of women are various; but all of them are of a nature to move grief and compassion rather than indignation and contempt, in all minds cognizant of the strange composition of humanity—the follies of the wise, the weakness of the strong, the lapses of the good; cognizant, also, of those surprising and deplorable inconsistencies “by which faults may sometimes be found to have grown out of virtues, and very many of our heaviest offences to have been grafted by human imperfection upon the best and kindest of our affections.”

The first and perhaps the largest class of prostitutes are those who may fairly be said to have had no choice in the matter—who were born and bred in sin; whose parents were thieves and prostitutes before them; whose dwelling has always been in an atmosphere of squalid misery and sordid guilt; who have never had a glimpse or a hearing of a better life; whom fate has marked from their cradle for a course of degradation; for whom there is no *fall*, for they stood already on the lowest level of existence; in whom there is no crime, for they had, and could have, neither an aspiration, a struggle, nor a choice. Such abound in London, in Dublin, in Glasgow; and, though to a less extent, in almost all large towns. Their families form the *classes dangereuses* of French statisticians; and it is from these that is recruited the population of the gaols, the lowest brothels, the hulks, and latterly, to some extent, the ragged schools. How this class is to be checked, controlled, diminished, and finally extirpated, presents one of the most difficult practical problems for English statesmen, and one, to the solution of which they must address themselves without delay; but it is one with which, at present, we have not to do. All that we wish to urge is, that the prostitutes who spring from this class, are clearly the victims of circumstances; and therefore must on all hands be allowed to be objects of the most unalloyed compassion.

Others, unquestionably, and alas! too many, fall from the snares of vanity. They are flattered by the attentions of those above them in station, and gratified by a language more refined and courteous than they hear from those of their own sphere. They enjoy the present pleasure, think they can secure themselves against being led on too far, and, like foolish moths, flutter round the flame which is to dazzle and consume them. For these we have no justification, and little apology to offer. Silly parents, and a defective or injudicious education, form their most frequent excuse. Still, even these are not worthy of the treatment they meet with, even from those of their own sex, who cannot be unconscious of the same foibles—still less from men. Let those who are without sin among us, cast the first stone at them.

Some, too, there are for whom no plea can be offered—who voluntarily and deliberately sell themselves to shame, and barter, in a cold spirit of bargain, chastity and reputation for carriages, jewels, and a luxurious table. All that can here be urged is the simple fact—too notorious to be denied, too disgraceful for the announcement of it to be listened to with patience—that in this respect the unfortunate women who ultimately come upon the town, are far from being the chief or the most numerous delinquents. For one woman who thus, of deliberate choice, sells herself to a lover, ten sell themselves to a husband. Let not the world cry shame upon us for the juxtaposition. The barter is as naked and as cold in the one case as in the other; the thing bartered is the same; the difference between the two transactions lies in the price that is paid down.

Many—and these are commonly the most innocent and the most wronged of all—are deceived by unreal marriages; and in these cases their culpability consists in the folly which confided in their lover to the extent of concealing their intention from their friends—in all cases a weak and in most cases a blameable concealment; but surely not one worthy of the fearful punishment which overtakes it. Many—far more than would generally be believed—fall from pure unknowingness. Their affections are engaged, their confidence secured; thinking no evil themselves, they permit caresses which in themselves, and to them, indicate no wrong, and are led on ignorantly and thoughtlessly from one familiarity to another, not conscious where those familiarities must inevitably end, till ultimate resistance becomes almost impossible; and they learn, when it is too late—what women can never learn too early or impress too strongly on their minds—that a lover's encroachments, to be repelled successfully, must be repelled and negated at the very outset.

We believe we shall be borne out by the observation of all who have inquired much into the antecedents of this unfortunate class of women—those, at least, who have not sprung from the *very* low, or the actually vicious sections of the community—in stating that a vast proportion of those who, after passing through the career of kept mistresses, ultimately come upon the town, fall in the first instance from a mere exaggeration and perversion of one of the best qualities of a woman's heart. They yield to desires in which they do not share, from a weak generosity which cannot refuse anything to the passionate entreaties of the man they love. There is in the warm fond heart of woman a strange and sublime unselfishness, which men too commonly discover only to profit by,—a positive love of self-sacrifice,—an active, so to speak, an *aggressive* desire to show their affection, by giving up to those who have won it, something they hold very dear. It is an unreasoning and dangerous yearning of the spirit, precisely analogous to that which prompts

the surrenders and self-tortures of the religious devotee. Both seek to prove their devotion to the idol they have enshrined, by casting down before his altar their richest and most cherished treasures. This is no romantic or over-coloured picture; those who deem it so have not known the better portion of the sex, or do not deserve to have known them. We refer confidently to all whose memory unhappily may furnish an answer to the question, whether an appeal to this perverted generosity is not almost always the final resistless argument to which female virtue succumbs. When we consider these things, and remember also, as we must now proceed to show, how many thousands trace their ruin to actual want—the want of those dependent on them—we believe, upon our honour, that nine out of ten originally modest women who fall from virtue, fall from motives or feelings in which sensuality and self have no share; nay, under circumstances in which selfishness, had they not been of too generous a nature to listen to its dictates, would have saved them.

We now come to speak of that hard necessity—that grinding poverty approaching to actual want—which, by unanimous testimony, is declared to be the most prolific source of prostitution, in this and in all other countries. In Paris the elaborate researches of Duchatelet have established this point in the clearest manner. After speaking of the prostitutes supplied by those families who live in vice and hopeless abandonment, he proceeds thus:—

“Of all causes of prostitution in Paris, and probably in all great towns, there are none more influential than the want of work, and indigence resulting from insufficient earnings. What are the earnings of our laundresses, our seamstresses, our milliners? Compare the wages of the most skilful with those of the more ordinary and moderately able, and we shall see if it be possible for these latter to procure even the strict necessities of life; and if we further compare the price of their work with that of their dishonour, we shall cease to be surprised that so great a number should fall into irregularities thus made almost inevitable. This state of things has naturally a tendency to increase, in the actual state of our society, in consequence of the usurpation by men of a large class of occupations, which it would be fitter and more honourable in our sex to resign to the other. Is it not shameful, for example, to see in Paris thousands of men in the prime of their age, in *cafés*, shops, and warehouses, leading the sedentary and effeminate life which is only suitable for women?”—Vol. i. p. 96.

M. Duchatelet adds some other facts, which fully confirm the testimony we shall have to bring respecting an unfortunate class in our own country, viz.: that filial and maternal affection drive many to at least occasional prostitution, as a means, and the only means left to them, of earning bread for those dependent on them for support.

"It is difficult to believe the trade of prostitution should have been embraced by certain women as a means of fulfilling their maternal or filial duties—nothing, however, is more true. It is by no means rare to see married women, widowed, or deserted by their husbands, and in consequence deprived of all support, become prostitutes with the sole object of saving their family from dying of hunger. It is still more common to find young girls, unable to procure from their honest occupations an adequate provision for their aged and infirm parents, reduced to prostitute themselves in order to eke out their livelihood. I have found too many particulars regarding these two classes, not to be convinced that they are much more numerous in Paris than is generally imagined."—Vol. i. p. 98.

He afterwards sums up the results of his investigations into the cases of 5,183 Parisian prostitutes, as follows:—

"2,696 driven to the profession by parental abandonment, excessive want, and actual destitution.  
 89 to earn food for the support of their parents or children.  
 280 driven by shame to fly from their homes.  
 2,118 abandoned by their seducers, and having nothing to turn to.  
 5,183"

We shall not take much pains in proving that poverty is the chief determining cause which drives women into prostitution in England, as in France; partly because we have no adequate statistics, and we are not disposed to present our readers with mere fallacious estimates, but mainly because no one doubts the proposition. Granting all that is or can be said of the idleness, extravagance, and love of dress of these poor women, the number of those who would adopt such a life, were other means of obtaining an adequate maintainance open to them, will be allowed on all hands to be small indeed. But we are particularly desirous to direct attention to some evidence recently laid before the public in Mr. Mayhew's letters to the *Morning Chronicle*, as to the severity of distress which daily drives many well-disposed and otherwise well-educated women to this disastrous and degrading resource.

"During the course of my investigation into the condition of those who are dependent upon their needle for their support, I had been so repeatedly assured that the young girls were mostly compelled to resort to prostitution to eke out their subsistence, that I was anxious to test the truth of the statement. I had seen much want, but I had no idea of the intensity of the privations suffered by the needlewomen of London until I came to inquire into this part of the subject. But the poor creatures shall speak for themselves. I should inform the reader, however, that I have made inquiries into the truth of the almost incredible statements here given, and I can in most of the

particulars at least vouch for the truth of the statement. Indeed, in one instance . . . . . I travelled nearly ten miles in order to obtain the character of the young woman. The first case is that of a good-looking girl. Her story is as follows :—

“‘I make moleskin trowsers. I get 7d. and 8d. per pair. I can do two pairs in a day, and twelve, when there is full employment, in a week. But some weeks I have no work at all. I work from six in the morning to ten at night; that is what I call my day's work. When I am fully employed, I get from 7s. to 8s. a week. My expenses out of that for twist, thread, and candles are about 1s. 6d. a week, leaving me about 6s. a week clear. But there's coals to pay for out of this, and that's at the least 6d. more; so 5s. 6d. is the very outside of what I earn when I'm in full work. Taking one week with another, all the year round, I don't make above 3s. clear money each week. I don't work at any other kind of slop work. The trowsers work is held to be the best paid of all. I give 1s. a week rent. My father died when I was five years of age. My mother is a widow, upwards of 66 years of age, and seldom has a day's work. Generally once in the week she is employed pot-scouring—that is, cleaning publicans' pots. She is paid 4d. a dozen for that, and does about four dozen and a half, so that she gets about 1s. 6d. in the day by it. For the rest she is dependent on me. I am twenty years of age the 25th of this month. We earn together, to keep the two of us, from 4s. 6d. to 5s. each week. Out of this we have to pay 1s. rent, and there remains 3s. 6d. to 4s. to find us both in food and clothing. It is of course impossible for us to live upon it, and the consequence is, I am obligated to go a bad way. I have been three years working at slop work. *I was virtuous when I first went to work, and I remained so till this last twelvemonth. I struggled very hard to keep myself chaste, but I found that I couldn't get food and clothing for myself and mother; so I took to live with a young man. He is turned twenty. He is a tinman. He did promise to marry me, but his sister made mischief between me and him; so that parted us. I have not seen him now for about six months, and I can't say whether he will keep his promise or not. I am now pregnant by him, and expect to be confined in two months' time. He knows of my situation, and so does my mother. My mother believed me to be married to him. She knows otherwise now. I was very fond of him, and had known him for two years before he seduced me. He could make 14s. a week. He told me if I came to live with him he'd take care I shouldn't want, and both mother and me had been very bad off before. He said, too, he'd make me his lawful wife, but I hardly cared so long as I could get food for myself and mother.* \* \* \*

“The next were two ‘trowsers hands,’ working for the same piece-mistress. I was assured by the woman by whom they were employed, and whom I visited expressly to make inquiries into the matter, that they were both hard-working and sober individuals. The first of these made the following extraordinary statement :—

“‘I work at slop trowsers, moleskin and cord—no cloth. We make

about 4s. a week, but we must work till nine or ten o'clock every night for that. We never make more than 4s., and very often less. If you go of an errand, or want a bit of bread, you lose time; and sometimes the work comes out harder—it's more stubborn, and takes more time. I've known it like a bit of board. I make, I should say, taking one week with another, about 3s 4d. a week. The sweater finds us our lodging: but we has to buy our candles out of what we make, and they cost us about 1d. each evening, or, I should say, 5d. a week. I earn clear just upon 3s.; that's about it. I find it very hard indeed to live upon that. If we fall ill we're turned off. The sweater won't keep us with her not the second day. I have been married. My husband has been dead seven year. \* \* I was always true to him while he was alive, so help me God! After his death I was penniless, with two young children. The only means I had of keeping myself and little ones was by the slop-work; and that brought me in about 5s. 6d. a week first-hand. That was to keep me and my two boys. \* \* My security died five year ago, and then the house that I had been used to work for refused to give me any more, so I was obligated to work for a sweater, and I have done so ever since. This was a heavy blow to me. I was getting about 5s. 6d. a week before then. The trowsers were better paid for at that time besides, and when I was obligated to work second-handed I couldn't get more than 4s. One of my boys was alive at this time, and we really could not live upon the money. I applied to the parish, and they wanted me to go into the house; but I knew if I did so, they'd take my boy from me, and I'd suffer anything first. *At times I was so badly off, me and my boy, that I was forced to resort to prostitution to keep us from starving.* It was not until after my security died that I did this. Before that we could just live by my labour, but afterwards it was impossible for me to get food and clothing for myself and child out of 4s. a week, which was all I could earn; so I was obligated to get a little more money in a way that I blush to mention to you. *Up to the time of the death of my security, I can swear, before God, I was an honest woman; and had the price I was paid for my labour been such that I could get a living by it, I would never have resorted to the streets for money.* I am sorry to say there is too many persons like me in the trade—*hundreds of married and single doing the same as I do, for the same reason.'*

We could fill pages with similar quotations. Truly, England is indeed "opulent in women ready to be ruined."

There are many modes in which the destitution and insufficient earnings of many classes of the poor lead directly or indirectly, to prostitution, on which, were we disposed to swell our pages with details, we might dwell at great length. Such is the gang-system by which much of the agriculture in the Eastern Counties of England is carried on, of the brutalizing consequences of which, full particulars may be found in the 'Report on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture,' published officially some years ago. Such is the mode in which many of the secondary

branches of our manufacturing industry are carried on. The mode however, in which, among the working classes, poverty most directly leads to loss of chastity, and ultimate prostitution, is common to all occupations and to all parts of the country; to the rural districts even more than to the towns. We allude to the insufficient house accommodation which, if we except the better portion of the manufacturing districts of Lancashire, Cheshire, and Warwickshire, may be said to be almost universal. Such is the state of the cottages inhabited by the labouring people that, however large the family, they have seldom more than one bed-room, never more than two. Married couples, grown-up children of both sexes, cousins, and even lodgers, occupy the same room, where the bedding is often insufficient, and the proximity necessarily close. The consequences may be easily imagined—more easily than described. The evidence on this part is frightful and overwhelming. We shall restrict ourselves to a very few extracts. The first are from the General Sanitary Report, published in 1842 :—

“In Hull” (says Mr. R. Wood) “I have met with a mother fifty years of age, and her son above twenty-one, sleeping in the same bed, and a lodger in the same room. . . . In a cellar in Liverpool, I found a mother and her grown-up daughter sleeping on a bed in one corner of the cellar, and in the other corner three sailors had their bed. . . . In Manchester I could enumerate a variety of instances in which I found such promiscuous mixture of the sexes in sleeping-rooms. I may mention one: a man, his wife and child sleeping in one bed; in another bed, two grown-up females, and in the same room two young men, unmarried. I have met with instances of a man, his wife, and his wife’s sister, sleeping in the same bed together. . . . I have frequently met with instances in which the parties themselves have traced their own depravity to these circumstances. For example, I found in one room in Hull a prostitute; and on asking the cause of her being brought to her present condition, she stated that she had lodged with a married sister, and slept in the same bed with her and her husband; that hence improper intercourse took place, and from that time she gradually became more and more depraved, until at length the town was her only resource. Another female of this description admitted that her first false step was in consequences of sleeping in the same room with a married couple. In the instance I have mentioned of the two single women sleeping in the same room with the married people, I have good authority for believing that they were common to the men.”

Mr. Thompson says—

“I have one highly respectable foreman, who has one daughter aged twenty, and another aged twenty-two, sleeping on each side of the bed in which himself and his wife sleep. The next bed-room is filled with the younger children of both sexes, boys and girls up to sixteen years of age.”



We might fill twenty pages with similar evidence from official reports, but we prefer to satisfy ourselves with the following picture from the more recent observations of the *Morning Chronicle*, (Letter XIII.)

“Let us consider, for a moment, the progress of a family among them. A man and woman intermarry, and take a cottage. In eight cases out of ten it is a cottage with but two rooms. For a time, so far as room at least is concerned, this answers their purpose; but they take it, not because it is at the time sufficiently spacious for them, but because they could not procure a more roomy dwelling, even did they desire it. In this they pass with tolerable comfort, considering their notions of what comfort is, the first period of married life. But, by-and-by, they have children, and the family increases until, in the course of a few years, they number perhaps from eight to ten individuals. But all this time there has been no increase to their household accommodation. As at first, so to the very last, there is but the one sleeping room. As the family increases additional beds are crammed into this apartment, until at last it is so filled with them that there is scarcely room left to move between them. As already mentioned, I have known instances in which they had to crawl over each other to get to their beds. So long as the children are very young, the only evil connected with this is the physical one arising from crowding so many people together into what is generally a dingy, frequently a damp, and invariably an ill-ventilated apartment. But years steal on, and the family continues thus bedded together. Some of its members may yet be in their infancy, but others of both sexes have crossed the line of puberty. But there they are, still together in the same room—the father and mother, the sons and the daughters—young men, young women, and children. Cousins, too, of both sexes, are often thrown together into the same room, and not unfrequently into the same bed. I have also known cases in which uncles slept in the same room with their grown-up nieces, and newly-married couples occupied the same chamber with those long married, and with those marriageable but unmarried. A case also came to my notice—already alluded to in connexion with another branch of the subject—in which two sisters, who were married on the same day, occupied adjoining rooms in the same hut, with nothing but a thin board partition, which did not reach the ceiling, between the two rooms, and a door in the partition which only partly filled up the door-way. For years back, in these same two rooms, have slept twelve people, of both sexes and all ages. Sometimes, when there is but one room, a praiseworthy effort is made for the conservation of decency. But the hanging up of a piece of tattered cloth between the beds, which is generally all that is done in this respect—and even that but seldom—is but a poor set-off to the fact that a family, which, in common decency, should, as regards sleeping accommodations, be separated at least into three divisions, occupy, night after night, but one and the same chamber. This is a frightful position for them to be in when an infectious or epidemic

disease enters their abode. But this, important though it be, is the least important consideration connected with their circumstances. That which is most so is the effect produced by them upon their habits and morals. In the illicit intercourse to which such a position frequently gives rise, it is not always that the tie of blood is respected. Certain it is that, when the relationship is even but one degree removed from that of a brother and sister, that tie is frequently overlooked. And when the circumstances do not lead to such horrible consequences, the mind, particularly of the female, is wholly divested of that sense of delicacy and shame which, so long as they are preserved, are the chief safeguards of her chastity. She therefore falls an early and an easy prey to the temptations which beset her beyond the immediate circle of her family. People in the other spheres of life are but little aware of the extent to what this precocious demoralization of the female amongst the lower orders in the country has proceeded. But how could it be otherwise? The philanthropist may exert himself in their behalf, the moralist may inculcate even the worldly advantages of a better course of life, and the minister of religion may warn them of the eternal penalties which they are incurring; but there is an instructor constantly at work more potent than them all, an instructor in mischief, of which they must get rid ere they make any real progress in their laudable efforts—and that is, *the single bed-chamber, in the two-roomed cottage.*"

Now we surely cannot be wrong in assuming that we have said enough to induce those who have hitherto thought of prostitutes only with disgust and contempt, to exchange these sentiments for the more just and more Christian feelings of grief, compassion, and desire to soothe and to save. The sin that arises from generous, though weak self-abandonment; the sin that is induced by the intolerable anguish of a child's starvation, must be regarded, both in heaven and on earth, with a very different degree and kind of condemnation from that which is called forth by frailty arising out of the cravings of vanity, or the unbridled indulgence of animal desire. Enough has surely been said to induce us to regard these unfortunate creatures rather as erring and suffering fellow-creatures, than as the outcasts and Pariahs they are now considered. But one more most weighty consideration remains before we quit this part of our subject.

We have seen that the great majority of these poor women fall, in the first instance, from causes in which vice and selfishness have no share. For that almost irresistible series of sequences, by which one lapse from chastity conducts ultimately to prostitution, *we*—the world—must bear the largest portion of the blame. What makes it *impossible* for them to retrace their steps?—almost impossible even to pause in the career of ruin? Clearly, that harsh, savage, unjust, unchristian public opinion which has resolved to regard a whole life of indulgence on the part of one sex as venial

and natural, and a single false step on the part of the other as irretrievable and unpardonable. How few women are there who after the first error, do not awake to repentance, agony, and shame, and would not give all they possess to be allowed to recover and recoil? They may be in love with their seducer—never with their sin. On the contrary, they hate it the more earnestly from having felt the weight of its chains, and tasted the bitterness of its degradation. They yearn, with a passionate earnestness of which mere innocence can form no conception, to be permitted to recover their lost position at the expense of any penitence, however severe, after the lapse of any time, however long. But we brutally refuse to lend an ear to these entreaties. Forgetting our Master's precepts—forgetting our human frailty—forgetting our own heavy portion in the common guilt—we turn contemptuously aside from the kneeling and weeping Magdalen, coldly bid her to despair, and leave her *alone with the irreparable*. Instead of helping her up, we thrust her down when endeavouring to rise; we choose to regard her, not as frail, but as depraved. Every door is shut upon her, every avenue of escape is closed. A sort of fate environs her. The more shame she feels (*i. e.*, the less her *virtue* has suffered in reality), the more impossible is her recovery, because the more does she shrink from those who might have been able to redeem her. She is driven into prostitution by the weight of all society pressing upon her.

If she is in the lower ranks of life, what resource but prostitution is open to her? If she be a sempstress, what lady will take her into her house to work? If she be a maid-servant, what mistress will either accept her, or retain her? If she belong to the classes immediately above those in the social scale, is the refuge of the family hearth freely opened to the repentant sinner, if her shame allows her to approach it? Has she most reason to expect that she will be spurned away from it with anger, or welcomed home with the tears of joy that are shed over the lost sheep? Alas! is it not notorious that, of a hundred fathers who would fall upon the neck of the prodigal son, and hail his return with unlimited forgiveness, there is scarcely one who, obedient to the savage morality of the world, would not turn his back upon the erring and repentant daughter? When shall we learn, in judging the moral delinquencies of the two sexes, to eschew those partial balances and false weights, which are an abomination to the Lord?

One only chance of restoration does society offer to the poor victim of seduction; and even this chance does not lie within her option. If her seducer can be induced, by bribe, persuasion, or threat, to marry her, her fault is, not expiated, but amended and obliterated; as the phrase goes, she is "made an honest woman again." What a withering sarcasm upon our ethical notions is

contained in that coarse expression ! If the poor girl can induce or compel the man who has betrayed her to swear a lie of fidelity to her at the altar,—if she can bind to her by legal process a libertine who, being bound against his will, is certain to hate her and abuse her,—if, having committed the one pitiable folly of yielding to an unworthy deceiver, she is willing to commit the still more monstrous folly of putting her whole future fate in his hands after his unworthiness has been made manifest,—then, on that hard condition, and on that only, can her character be whitewashed. The pardon of society is granted or withheld, according as she can, or cannot, obtain a legal hold on her betrayer ! For ourselves, we confess that in the cases which have come before us, we have seldom felt disposed to counsel such views or such proceedings. We have said, “Do not let one false step lead you on to commit another, of which the punishment may last through life : we will do everything that lies in our power to hide your shame, and enable you to recover your position and atone for your sin ; but do not, for the sake of avoiding what you have brought upon yourself, make yourself the slave of a man who has already injured you, and now wishes to desert you. Do not take a step of irremediable mischief, for the sake of escaping the world’s reproaches ; since the deed itself, and its appearance to your own conscience, can be changed by no subsequent proceedings !” We must, however, add, that we have rarely found the victims of seduction willing to listen to our reasoning. Their desire of recovering a social position, and their horror of the probable alternative, were generally strong enough to induce them to welcome all the terrors of an unhappy marriage.

Yet this is really the sole condition on which society will pardon the erring ; the only way it offers to them of retrieving that which, were better and kindlier notions to prevail, might generally be retrieveable. At its door lie the consequences of this harsh decision.

For the *first* fatal, but pardonable error of women, vanity, weakness, unregulated affection, the pressure of want, the perversion of generosity, or the cruel deceptions of others, must generally bear the blame ; for those subsequent and far guiltier steps, by which frailty gradually darkens into coarse and grievous sin, the hard-hearted, inequitable Pharisaism of society must be held responsible. In this matter “we are verily guilty concerning our sister ;” and women are even guiltier than men. Let us for a moment, look at this monstrous barbarity from a natural, rather than a conventional point of view ; and let those who are shocked at the uncompromising plainness of our speech, look back upon their own experience, and question, if they can, the experience of others as to the truth of our remarks, before they venture to condemn us. We have no wish to extenuate the sin or to palliate the weakness ; but above all, and

before all, let us be *just*. What is, among the originally correct-minded and well-conducted, the real difference between the first sacrifice at the shrine of love, in the case of a married and of an unmarried woman? It is not that the one feels that she is acting virtuously, and the other that she is acting viciously—the *sense of shame is the same in both cases*: we appeal to all modestly brought up women if it be not so. Indeed, can it be otherwise? As a most virtuous and sensible lady once said, “It is not a quarter-of-an-hour’s ceremony in a church that can make *that* welcome or tolerable to pure and delicate feelings, which would otherwise outrage their whole previous notions, and their whole cultivated taste and sense.” Among the decorously educated (and it is of such only that we are now speaking), the first sacrifice is made and exacted, *in both cases*, in a delirium of mingled love and shame. The married woman feels shame, often even remorse, and a strange confusion of all her previous moral conceptions; but the world laughs at her scruples—tells her that her feelings are all nonsense, and exalts her to the honours of a matron. The unmarried woman experiences the same confusion, remorse, and shame; and the world re-echoes her feelings—confirms the sentence she has passed upon herself, and casts her out upon a dunghill. The practical difference between them being that the church ceremony—which could not change the nature of the action *common to both, and accompanied and prompted by the same feelings in both*—secures to the one a permanent protection, and the sanction of the world and the world’s laws; while the other imprudent, deceived, or self-sacrificing creature, is left destitute of either; and the world steps in and says to her, “You shall not return to peace, or virtue, or domestic life—the paradise of comfort and hope is closed to you for ever upon earth!” Let us trust that Heaven is more merciful and just. The married woman says to her, “We have both submitted with reluctance and distress to the embraces of the man we loved; but to me the consequences are a happy home and loving children, who are a glory and a crown of honour to my hearthstone; to you, the consequences are desertion, horror, and degradation, and your children shall be a terror and a curse to you. The very same deed—varied only in its antecedents—which leaves *me* free to kneel the next morning at the throne of grace, with an unstained conscience and an assured hope—makes *you* feel that Heaven has cast you off, and that the altar, to which you cling in your agony, is polluted by your touch: and all this, because *I* had secured a protector and a legal sanction before I yielded, and you had *not*.” Let us not be misunderstood. We are far from meaning to affirm that the circumstance of obtaining a legal and religious licence beforehand, does not constitute a wide and vital distinction between the cases; but where it is, as it often is, the

only distinction, it cannot of itself suffice to constitute the one a loathsome wretch, while the other is a pure and honoured matron. The instinctive feeling of mankind assures us that there must be something sadly wrong and out of joint in the premises that lead to such a decision. Justice and mercy forbid us to confirm the harsh decree.

Moreover, the mercy, the gentleness, the kind consideration towards human infirmity, the tender treatment of guilt, which we deny to the victim, we lavish on the betrayer. *Hers* is innate depravity, hopeless degradation, unworthiness which must be pushed out of sight, blotted from memory, ignored in good society and polite speech; *his* are the venial errors of youth, the ordinary tribute to natural desires, the common laxity of a man of the world. Truly, it is time we should come to a sounder estimation and a juster judgment-seat: we owe a fairer reckoning both to those whom we condemn, and to those whom we absolve.

Let us now cast a short glance at the *extent* of this hideous gangrene of English society. We have given a sketch of the life of one prostitute: we have to multiply this by thousands for every large town, by tens of thousands for the metropolis. We shall not pretend to give any definite numbers; little is known with certainty; and the estimates, even among those likely to be best informed, vary enormously. Colquhoun, at the end of the last century, gave the numbers residing in London alone at 50,000. This is now admitted on all hands to have been a monstrous exaggeration. Mr. Mayne, one of the Commissioners of Police, states the number of regular prostitutes who might be traced, at from 8,000 to 10,000 in the metropolis, *exclusive of the city*; but he adds, "There is no means of ascertaining the number of female servants, milliners, and women in the upper and middle ranks of society, who might properly be classed with prostitutes, or the women who frequent theatres exclusively, barracks, ships, prisons, &c., &c." Mr Talbot states, as the result of the most careful inquiries that have been made, that the number in Edinburgh is about 800; in Glasgow, 1,800; in Liverpool, 2,900; in Leeds, 700; in Bristol, 1,300; in Manchester, about 700; and in Norwich, between 500 and 700. If to these we add the number furnished by other towns, and the numbers who everywhere escape the knowledge of the police, the impression among the best informed is, that the number who live by prostitution, whose sole profession it may be said to be, cannot be under 50,000 in Great Britain. This of course does not include those women of loose character who follow also some ostensible and honest occupation.

We are desirous of avoiding all needless details which would

deter readers from following us to our conclusions. We shall therefore pass over many facts, which it might otherwise have been desirable to publish, and will refer those who wish for further information, to the works of Dr. Ryan, and more especially to that of Mr. Talbot. We shall here content ourselves with three or four brief statements.

1. Most of the higher class of brothels are supplied by means of regularly-employed and highly-paid procuresses, whose occupation it is to entice to their houses female servants and governesses applying in answer to advertisements, and young women—frequently young ladies—who come up to London for employment, and do not know where to fix their lodgings. . . . Sometimes by cajolery, sometimes by force, sometimes by drugs, they are kept close prisoners till their ruin is effected ; when they are handed over to the brothel keepers, and their place supplied by fresh victims.

2. One of the most painful facts connected with the whole subject, is the tender age at which thousands of these poor creatures are seduced. On no point is the evidence more clear than this. Not only is a vast proportion of existing prostitutes under twenty, but the number who become prostitutes at the age of fifteen, twelve, and even ten years, is such as almost to exceed credibility. This is known from the testimony of the hospitals into which they are brought to be treated for syphilitic diseases. Mr. Laing (Talbot, p. 29) tells us of one child who died of a worn-out constitution at the age of thirteen ! It is for the old and withered *débauchés* that these youngest victims are ordinarily selected.

3. The extent to which the frequentation of brothels is carried among all classes and professions, and even among the married of both sexes, is little suspected by the public at large. On this topic some frightful disclosures have, from time to time, had to be hushed up ; though not soon enough to prevent an astounding glimpse of the hideous iniquity within. What does the reader think of the following, which we give on the authority of Mr. Talbot.

“ In a recent examination of a man named D——, before the Court of Bankruptcy, Birmingham, the bankrupt stated (and had entered the expenses in his schedule), that he was constantly in the habit of visiting brothels, in one of which he expended in one night the enormous sum of £40 for champagne only ; and that, among numerous items of a most extravagant nature, there appeared one of £2,000 a-year for a kept mistress. Mr. Smith, solicitor for the bankrupt, stated publicly, that ‘ if the examination be pursued, parties now living in happiness with their families may be brought before this court for examination, and disclosures made which must inevitably ruin their domestic peace. Some men in this town, respectable in their stations, must have their names brought before the world as visitors of a brothel, and associates of one whose immorality cannot be doubted. The persons I refer to

are holding important positions in the town ; and, as I am anxious to avoid such disclosures, I would rather throw up the case, and leave it in the hands of any one who may succeed me, than proceed.' ”

4. It is notorious that nearly all prostitutes except the highest class are either thieves themselves, or are connected with and supporters of professional thieves. It is calculated, by those most conversant with police courts, that more than one half of those convicted of larceny are prostitutes or their associates.

5. One of the most important practical points connected with this painful subject, is the deplorable extent and virulence of disease which prostitution is the means of spreading throughout the community. Sanitary matters occupy so large a share of public attention at the present moment, that so important a branch of them cannot be wholly overlooked. The amount of social evil arising from syphilitic maladies, statistics cannot measure, even if trustworthy statistics on the subject were within our reach, which they are not. All that we know with certainty is, that the Lock Hospitals (those devoted to syphilitic patients) throughout the country are always full, and generally insufficient. One witness affirms that not one man in ten goes through life without being diseased at one period or another of his career. We do not believe this statement : but we do know that the disease prevails to an extent that is perfectly appalling ; and that where there are 50,000 prostitutes scattered over the country (a vast majority of whom are, or have been diseased), spreading infection on every side of them, quarantines against the plague, and costly precautions against cholera, seem very like straining at gnats and swallowing camels. It must not be imagined that the mischief of syphilis can be measured by the number of those who are ostensibly its victims, even could we ascertain this datum. We must take into account the sufferings of those innocent individuals in private life who are infected through the sins of others ; we must take into account the happiness of many families thus irretrievably destroyed ; the thousands of children who are in consequence born into the world with a constitution incurably unsound ; the certain, but incalculable deterioration of public health and of the vigour of the race, which must ensue in the course of a generation or two more. None but medical men can have an adequate insight into the degree or the ramifications of this great social mischief ; and medical men will tell us that it is not easy to overrate either. Surely this is a point which must soon command the most anxious attention of the state authorities.

“De toutes les maladies” (says Duchatelet, vol. ii. p. 37) “qui peuvent affecter l'espèce humaine par voie de contagion, et qui portent à la société les plus grands préjudices, il n'en est pas de plus grave, de plus dangereuse, et de plus à redouter, que la syphilis. Sous ce rapport, je



ne crains pas d'être démenti en disant que les désastres qu'elle procure l'emportent sur les ravages qu'ont exercés toutes les pestes qui, de temps en temps, sont venues porter la terreur dans la société.

"La peste, et en général toutes les épidémies, nous effraient parceque nous n'y sommes pas accoutumés, parcequ'elles frappent à la fois un grand nombre de victimes, parcequ'elles se jouent des moyens qu'on leur oppose et des remèdes avec lesquelles on cherche à les combattre ; mais toutes ces pestes sont passagères, les vides qu'elles laissent dans les populations sont à peine sensibles ; de longs intervalles séparent le plus ordinairement les moments de leurs apparitions, et les coups qui frappent quelques unes tombent souvent de préférence sur les vieillards, les infirmes, et ces êtres débiles, inutiles à la société, et qui dans tout état de choses, ne sauraient long-temps prolonger leur carrière.

"La syphilis est chez nous—elle est chez nos voisins,—elle est dans l'univers ; elle ne tue pas immédiatement, il est vrai, comme beaucoup d'autres maladies, mais cela n'empêche pas que le nombre de ses victimes ne soit immense. Ses ravages n'ont pas d'interruption ; elle frappe de préférence cette partie de la population qui, par son âge, fait la force aussi bien que la richesse des états. La syphilis vient énerver cette population au moment même de son existence, où, par les lois de la nature, elle se trouve en état de procréer des êtres vigoureux ; et si elle ne rend pas cette population stérile, les malheureux qui en proviennent forment une race abâtardie, aussi impropre aux fonctions civiles qu'au service militaire. Enfin, l'innocence et la vertu la plus pure ne sont pas, dans nos sociétés modernes, à l'abri de ses atteints ; que de nourrices mercénaires, que d'épouses vertueuses, que d'enfants à la mamelle, n'en sont pas tous les ans cruellement attaqués."

Such being the evil we have to deal with, we now come to the practical and most painful questions—Can it be eradicated?—and if not, what can and ought to be done to mitigate its mischief and diminish its amount? And is the *quasi*-sanction given to the practice, by such a recognition of it as is involved in the attempt to control it by certain administrative regulations, a greater or less evil than the consequences which at present flow from its unchecked prevalence?

Can Prostitution be eradicated?—At present, *per saltum* and *ab extra*, certainly not. In a state of society like that which now prevails in England,—with livelihood so difficult, and marriage so impeded by scantiness of means,—with so many thousands constantly on the verge, and sometimes beyond the verge, of starvation, and whose urgent poverty will therefore overrule their reluctant wills,—with idleness so prevalent among the rich, and education so defective among the poor,—with the vice so sanctioned by the custom of centuries as to have become a thing of course,—with the hundreds of female devils who prowl about day and night seeking for their prey,—with the countless temptations which beset the path of the innocent, and the countless obstacles which are cast in the backward

steps of the repentant,—we fear that the extinction of the practice, or even its reduction from a rule to an exception, must be a most slow, gradual, and incalculably difficult process. That it may, in time, and by bringing to bear upon it all the sound, moral, social, and economic influences in our power, be more and more discarded by the respectable, as a low and disreputable habit, and confined to the vulgar and the vicious, we are not without strong hopes; but at present we must be content, however reluctantly, to regard it as one of those admitted and established evils which the statist has to accept and to deal with as he best may.

We will venture now on a few remarks, which we throw out rather for the thoughtful consideration of our readers, than as meaning to commit ourselves to any decision on a question which we confess to be the knottiest, the saddest, and the most disturbing which can engage the ethical inquirer.

*First.* Is it not the fact that the sexual propensity is awakened into unnaturally early and undue activity, by the bad condition and regulation of nearly all seminaries of education—for all classes? The early initiation, if not into vice, at all events into vicious ideas; the licentious language and the coarse and vulgar habits which there prevail; have undoubtedly to answer for much of the evil that exists. For where modesty is so early broken down, and where the passions are awakened before the principles have had time to become formed or fixed, the difficulty of maintaining virtue, when temptations press around, becomes excessive. If, instead of permitting among all ranks careless association with the coarse and bad, and enforcing, in addition, among the higher classes, daily perusal of the works of a licentious age, the education of boys were to be conducted with any degree of the same watchful attention to purity that marks that of girls, and that of young Catholic priests (in this country, at least,) the gain to the whole tone of public morals would, we are convinced, be something beyond estimation. The difficulties in the way of this amelioration are great; but if the immense importance of the object were once duly felt, they would not be found insurmountable.

*Secondly.* In all moral perplexities there is no guide so sure as nature, when interrogated honestly and with competent knowledge. Now, as physiologists and psychologists well know, it is an entire misapprehension to assume, as is generally done, that nature intended the gratification of the passions to commence with the age of puberty, or indeed till some years after. If it were so, the degeneration of the race would be the certain and speedy consequence, by a double operation; for though puberty is reached at the age of fifteen or sixteen, yet the power of procreation in the human animal, consistently with the conservation of full vigour in the

parent and the transmission of due vigour to the offspring, is rarely attained before twenty-five, and never before twenty-one. The ancient Germans were so well aware of this, that they fixed the former period of life as the earliest at which marriages could be legally contracted : and they made the regulation avowedly on these grounds. Furthermore, what would be the result on the general tone of society, were the sexual desire gratified as soon as it arose ? Where should we find that reverence for the female sex, that tenderness towards their feelings, that deep devotion of the heart to them, which is the beautiful and purifying part of love ? Is it not certain that all of delicate and chivalric which still prevades our sentiments towards women, may be traced to *repressed*, and therefore hallowed and elevated passion ? Whence could chivalry of old have arisen, save out of chastity ? And what, in these days, can preserve chastity, save some relic of chivalrous devotion ? Are we not all aware that a young man can have no safeguard against sensuality and low intrigue, like an early, virtuous, and passionate attachment ?

*Thirdly.* Even if religion and religious men had never spoken upon the subject, is there any form of unchastity which a man can deliberately regard without instinctive condemnation,—considering merely the dictates of natural justice and the requirements of social well-being,—arguing and feeling, in a word, simply as a judicious and right-minded heathen might do ? The frequenting of prostitutes revolts at once his natural instincts, his acquired refinement, and his better taste :—a proceeding which inevitably leads him into low company, which exposes him to filthy language and disgusting scenes, and which, till custom has dulled his susceptibility, quenches the very desire it is intended to gratify, he feels must carry its own condemnation on its face. Then how can he reconcile to *any* code his bearing a share in conduct which sinks so many fellow-creatures, meant for a purer vocation and capable of better things, into a state of wretchedness so abject, of degradation so vile, of squalor so hopeless and despairing ?—Can he enjoy with any complacency the company of a kept mistress, when he thinks whence she comes and whether she is tending ?—when he admits to himself, what no specious glosses can conceal—that her position is no tenable one, but is only a half-way house between innocence and prostitution ?—In what cloak or guise can he so dress up seduction, as to persuade himself into conceiving it admissible ? If he intends to desert the girl who yields to him, he is a robber and a ruffian, and must regard himself as such. If he remains faithful to her, in what way is that connexion possible to him in which marriage would not have been possible also ? How can he maintain her more cheaply than he could have maintained a wife, unless by refusing to his companion the luxuries which he would not resign for himself, and could not

afford for two; or by bringing up the children that would result equally in either case, in a lower condition of life than his own? And how can any man reconcile the gross selfishness of the first alternative, and the violation of all paternal duty of the second, with the commonest notions either of generosity, of justice, or of gentlemanly feeling? And, as a matter of fact, looking to the mere economics of the question, is seduction found by those whose conscience compels them to do anything like justice to their companion and their children, to be at all cheaper than a frugal, well-assorted and reputable marriage?—The only remaining form of unchastity—that of intrigue with a married woman—is condemned, by Christian and worldly moralists alike, as a violation of vows, a deception of confidence, and a cruel destruction of domestic felicity. When, therefore, we find that it is not religion only, but taste, refinement, and a simple sense of justice, equally, which forbid unchastity, we should pause and reflect deeply before we give ourselves the ready excuses and the easy absolution that we do.

Without further discussion, however, we are prepared to concede that, as society is at present constituted, illicit intercourse will and must prevail to a very considerable extent; and from this, prostitution, we fear, must inevitably flow. In all countries, and in all times, ancient or modern, prostitution has invariably been found wherever the population has been congregated in large masses. But it is our firm conviction that, by looking the difficulty fairly in the face, this unhappy vice might be vastly diminished in degree, and the social evils which arise from it greatly mitigated in intensity. For example, there can be no doubt that it exists in France to at least as great an extent as with us, yet without being productive of nearly the same amount of mischief either to society, or to the unfortunate women themselves. Let us inquire whence this difference arises.

Some years since, a physician of great eminence and still greater benevolence, Parent-Duchatelet by name, was led to investigate the whole subject in that minute, elaborate, and scientific manner, which is peculiar to French statisticians. He devoted eight years to the investigation, and has left behind him in two large volumes, an immense mass of curious and instructive details, both as to the numbers, the characters, and the habits of Parisian prostitutes, and as to the measures adopted by the administration in dealing with them. He encountered many obstacles, and not a little blame, in the course of his labours. He, however, persevered in his researches, and we will now proceed to give a few of the more important results which he brought to light, omitting all such as are merely curious.

For some centuries back, the evils which prostitution inflicted on public decency, public morals, and public health, have attracted the

anxious attention of the French administration ; and various schemes of repression and regulation have been tried, in turns, by the able men who have succeeded one another at the head of the police department. Some of these have been in a great measure successful ; some have altogether failed, and have been from time to time abandoned. At present few or no regulations are embodied in the code ; but the matter is left pretty much to the discretion of the chiefs of the *Bureau des Mœurs* and the general police. These authorities act as they deem best, taking care not to go further in any direction than public sympathy will go with them, but complaining bitterly of the insufficiency and the indefiniteness of their powers.

The prostitutes of Paris may be divided into three classes :—those who are registered, and are in consequence under the protection and surveillance of the authorities ; those who exercise their profession in too clandestine or too respectable a manner to come under the supervision of the police ; and those wretches who swarm in the common lodging-houses, and in those haunts of vice and squalor near the barracks and the outskirts of the city, which in every country are the opprobrium and despair of the guardians of social order. The number of the two latter classes cannot even be guessed at ; the last are unquestionably very numerous, and their general condition wretched and filthy past description. It has, for a long period, been the chief aim of the administration to increase the first class at the expense of the two others, and towards this desirable end they are making slow but steady progress. They argue thus : “All experience and all history shows that prostitution is an evil inherent in large towns. Wherever great numbers of men assemble together, prostitutes are certain to abound ; all the efforts of statesmen, moralists, and ministers of religion, have been found inadequate to repress, or even materially to diminish, this sad practice. The wretchedness which results to one sex, and the frightful maladies which it entails on both, have never been effectual or even appreciable checks to its prevalence ; it must be accepted therefore as a disease, like any other, incident to our state of society, and its evil consequences met and mitigated as they best may. By gradually drawing all prostitutes within the circle of our control, we can introduce regulations, and enforce checks on their proceedings, which will enable us to repress all more scandalous disorders, keep the evil within some limits, greatly promote the externals of decency, and materially diminish, and in time extinguish, the disease which now makes such grievous ravages among all classes.”

On these principles they have now acted for many years with steady perseverance ; and the number of prostitutes inscribed on the register of the *Bureau des Mœurs* increased from 1,300 in 1812,

to 3,600 in 1832, and now considerably exceeds 4,000. These girls, whether resident in "*maisons tolérées*," or in private lodgings, are subject to the constant surveillance of authorized inspectors and medical men; certain rules of behaviour are enforced upon them, to ensure external decency and the absence of all appearances that could scandalize the public eye or ear; and they are subject to frequent periodical visits (generally once a fortnight, at least) from an appointed physician, who, if he finds them diseased, at once withdraws their certificate (for practising without which, they are liable to arbitrary arrest), and sends them to the hospital appointed for their reception. The same authorities give permission to certain women called "*dames des maisons*," to keep brothels, on condition of their observing such regulations as shall from time to time be laid down for their government. These women are selected with great care from among the applicants, and licenses are only granted to such as are supposed to possess the needful qualities for enforcing order among their inmates. The number of girls they are allowed to have is fixed; the strictest rules for decorum are enforced, and the inspectors are entitled to enter these houses at any hour, to see that none of these rules are contravened. In 1832 there were about 200 of these "*maisons tolérées*" in Paris.

Duchatelet enters into a number of curious details as to the provinces whence the Parisian prostitutes chiefly come; the occupation they followed before their registration; the reasons which drove them to their mode of life; the degree of education they had received, &c.,—into which matters we shall not follow him. Two points, however, of especial interest we shall mention. Of 3,235 registered prostitutes in the year 1831, 29 were under sixteen years of age; 344 were under twenty; and 44 were upwards of fifty! Of the same number, 14 began their professional life (or rather were registered *as already practising it*) before the age of fourteen! 196 before the age of seventeen; and 946 before the age of twenty. Of 3,517, whose cases M. Duchatelet was able to inquire into minutely, 242 had practised for upwards of fourteen years, and 641 more than ten years! a result differing greatly from any we should find in London. Another very important difference between the two countries is this: in England prostitutes sink rapidly from one grade of their miserable profession to a lower and a lower; their career is said seldom to exceed three years, and they almost never succeed in escaping from their condition. In Paris, among the registered prostitutes (of whom only we have the means of speaking with any certainty), M. Duchatelet informs us that they seldom remain long on the books;\* the

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\* "*Rappelons-nous que la prostitution n'est, pour la masse des filles publiques, qu'un état transitoire; qu'elles le quittent pour la plupart dès la première année, et que très peu y persistent jusqu'à l'extinction.*" —*Duchatelet*, vol. ii. p. 16.

names of about 700 (out of 4,000) are every year erased, in consequence of their silent disappearance; sometimes by death, but oftener from having found some other mode of life, honest, or less dishonourable than their former one; while 400 every year *claim the erasure of their own names*, and procure it on proving to the authorities that they have obtained some other mode of livelihood. What becomes of these girls after quitting their discreditable career, it is interesting to inquire. M. Duchatelet was able to trace the course of 1,680 of them, who disposed of themselves as follows:—

108 became *dames des maisons*.

864 became milliners, sempstresses, washerwomen, &c.

247 became shopkeepers either on their own account, or in partnership with others.

461 became domestic servants.

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1680

Of 3,401 other individuals who were erased from the lists, the reasons assigned for their erasure were as follows:—

239 were rescued, and sent to their native districts by the kind offices of others.

428 died.

1206 retired of their own accord, and left Paris with regular passports.

254 were reclaimed by their parents.

28 were reclaimed by their husbands.

114 retired, having a competence.

121 married!

101 became kept mistresses.

319 entered Magdalen hospitals, or similar institutions.

591 various causes.

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3401

It is not, we think, possible to doubt that the *power of recovery* indicated by the above figures, so different from anything which obtains in England, is mainly attributable to the fact that the protection and supervision of the authorities has not only secured in these girls greater decency of conduct than would otherwise have prevailed,\* but, by making them feel that they are no longer outcasts

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\* Every one who has visited the continental cities must have been struck with the marked contrast observable between the behaviour of the same class of girls in the public streets of England, and in France, or Germany.—Abroad, the bold gaze, the gaudy attire, the offensive solicitations, so constantly observed with us, are never seen. How many of our youths fall victims to the invitations to sin which now meet them every where at night, who, if left to themselves, would never actually *seek* the common haunts of infamy!

from all law, whose very existence is ignored, has prevented that desperation and utter self-abandonment which cannot but ensue from the impression (which the whole course of *our* language and proceedings towards them is calculated to convey) that their case is hopeless, and that the whole human race is at enmity with them.

That a steady and marked amelioration in the character of the Parisian *filles-de-joie* has of late years been observable, there can be no doubt.

“Tous ceux” (says M. Duchatelet) “qui, depuis vingt-cinq à trente ans, ont étudié les filles publiques de Paris, conviennent que sous le rapport de la décence, de la retenue, on pourrait dire de la pudeur, il s’est opéré en elles un changement bien remarquable : en public elles n’ont plus le ton insolent, l’air hautain, et le regard agaçant qu’elles affectaient autrefois ; dans les hôpitaux et surtout dans les prisons, elles sont, sous ce rapport, métamorphosées. Ce changement s’est fait particulièrement depuis dix à douze ans : en faisant mes recherches, et en consultant les dénonciations et les rapports, je trouvais, à mesure que je m’approchais de l’époque actuelle, moins de détails de ces scènes d’une lubricité dégoûtante, qui maintenant sont fort rares dans l’intérieur de Paris. Pendant et avant la révolution, on parle souvent de femmes nues se promenant et dansant en plein jour en cet état : il n’y a pas encore vingt ans que l’on comptait parmi les prostituées de Paris cinquante ou soixante mauvais sujets qui par l’excès de leur libertinage, leur hardiesse, et la turbulence de leur esprit, donnaient le ton à toutes les autres, et rendaient très difficile le maintien de l’ordre et de la décence. Ces filles ont successivement disparu, et celles qui les ont remplacées n’ont pas présenté le même caractère.

“Cette amélioration est due aux soins de l’administration, à sa continuelle surveillance, et à la persévérance avec laquelle elle poursuit les projets de répression et de réforme ; *les prostituées restant, en général, peu de temps dans l’exercice de leur métier*, et ne faisant, pour ainsi dire, qu’y passer, les traditions se perdent et s’oublient facilement chez elles : on est donc maître en quelque sorte de les obliger à respecter la décence publique, et à conserver les dehors de la pudeur.”

The benefit to public health which has resulted from the administrative measures that have been pursued, may be imagined from these two facts : upwards of 1,000 girls annually are arrested in the exercise of their profession, in consequence of syphilitic symptoms, and sent by authority into the hospital, where they are sequestered till their complete recovery is certified. Had it not been for this precaution, these girls would have continued to spread disease around them, and might have infected thousands, both of the guilty and the innocent. The other fact is this : in the year 1812, when the present sanitary regulations were first introduced, the proportion of registered prostitutes found infected at the periodical visits of the medical inspector, was one in twenty—it is now reduced to one in



thirty-four. The impression of the authorities, and of M. Duchatelet also, is, that if they were empowered to extend their control over all, in any rank, who practice prostitution, and could subject them to periodical visits, and to sequestration when their sanitary condition required it, the syphilitic disease might be extirpated in a few generations ; and we make no question that they are right.

We have now placed before our readers the data necessary to enable them to follow us in the inquiry which will close this paper :—Ought we to do anything, and *what* ought we to do, in England, to diminish prostitution, and mitigate the intensity of the evils which arise from it ?

On two points all parties are agreed, and the law has ratified the decision of the public. The first of these is, that traders in prostitution—those who make it their occupation to collect and entrap victims for the lust of others—shall be punished with wholesome severity. On the unpardonable, unredeemed infamy of this trade, all men are unanimous : to those who carry it on no mercy should be shown. The common law having been found insufficient to meet crimes of this sort, a very concise and peremptory Act of Parliament was passed in the last session,\* by which it is provided, “that if any person shall, by false pretences, false representations, or other fraudulent means, procure any woman or child under the age of twenty one years, to have illicit carnal connexion with any man, such person shall be guilty of a misdemeanour, and shall, being duly convicted thereof, suffer imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years, with hard labour.” All that is needed to give full effect to this enactment is, that public opinion shall be thoroughly enlisted in its behalf ; that the police authorities shall give instructions to their detective agents to keep a watchful eye upon the procurers and procuresses (whose persons will soon become known to them) who make it their business to haunt and waylay young girls on their first arrival from the country, and entrap them into houses of ill-fame under pretence of providing them with lodgings ; and who frequent, for the same purpose, the registration offices for servants out of place ; that the police should have authority, *suo periculo*, and under due restrictions, to enter, without notice, any houses which they *know* to be used for improper purposes, in order to be at hand to rescue those girls (whose number we know to be considerable) who are anxious to make their escape as soon as they find out the true character of the place into which they have been inveigled, but who are prevented, by force or fraud, from doing so ; and finally, that the judge should, in all cases, inflict the highest penalty the law awards. By this means it would soon be understood

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\* This article was first published in July, 1850.

that this mode of pandering to the passions of the depraved was an enormity which society would not tolerate, and it would speedily be reduced within very narrow limits ; for though the gains of these creatures are often so immense that fines have no effect upon them, yet imprisonment, with hard labour, would have a very different result. Moreover, it must never be forgotten that law, when steadily enforced, has an immense influence in forming public opinion ; and that any act regularly visited with a disgraceful punishment will soon come *to be looked upon* as disgraceful, both to the actors and the abettors.

The second point upon which all are agreed is, that carnal connexion with children of tender years, *with or without consent*, is a high crime and misdemeanour. On this subject, also, the law has spoken clearly ; and by an enactment now some years old, a man charged with rape on the person of a child under thirteen years of age, cannot plead her consent in bar of judgment. If any of those hoary sinners, for whose depraved appetites so many of these infant victims are yearly provided in the metropolis, could be brought to justice, and either hanged or transported for the offence, this, too, would become infamous and dangerous, and would cease to be practised by those who are now the chief offenders, viz., men whose wealth and position in society render pecuniary penalties matters of no consideration, but who would not for worlds encounter the risk of a personal and publicly dishonouring punishment. The first worn-out *débauché* of rank who was hanged for corrupting a child of twelve years old (an offence committed probably every day in the year), would almost ensure the safety of this class of victims for the future.

A third proposition, which meets with the consent of most sober thinkers on this painful subject is, that voluntary intercourse between parties of mature age, however immoral in itself, must not be interfered with, unless carried on in such a manner as to outrage public decency, or endanger public health. On this point, however, we are at issue with those closet moralists who think that prostitution is, in itself and in any form, a sin which calls for legal repression ; and also with those societies, composed of most estimable men, and productive unquestionably of much good, who make it their object to suppress brothels wherever they can obtain sufficient evidence against them. We must enter a little on the question at issue between us, for it is one of much practical importance.

If it were possible really to put down prostitution entirely by penal measures of repression, and if, in doing so, no greater evils were incurred than the one we cured, there could then be no question as to the advisability of a war *à l'outrance* against brothels, brothel-keepers, and all their inmates and frequenters. But is there any

one at all acquainted with the past history or the present state of the matter, who entertains the slightest idea of such a result being attainable by such means? There is no age or country in which statisticians have not been called upon to grapple with the question; in which the virtuous portion of the community have not been shocked and scandalised at the spectacle of public prostitution; in which the evils which resulted from it, both to health and morals, have not arrested the attention of the rulers; in which the disease and misery consequent on this vice have not spoken in the loudest tones of warning to its votaries of both sexes;—yet prostitution still flourishes in undiminished vigour, and, alas! in many countries with augmented mischief. One after another the statesmen who have undertaken to eradicate or control it, have retired, baffled and defeated, from the contest; and the prospect of imprisonment, scourging, public ignominy, loathsome disease, and lingering death, have proved alike unavailing to counteract the passions of one sex, and the weakness of the other. Without, therefore, going so far as some writers, who maintain that prostitution is necessary, and that it contributes to the maintenance of order and tranquillity, we feel obliged to admit it as a constant fact—a social datum which we have to deal with—an evil inseparable from the agglomeration of large numbers in one locality. “*Sous des formes qui varient suivant les climats, les mœurs nationales, la prostitution reste inhérente aux grandes populations; elle est, et sera toujours comme ces maladies de naissance, contre lesquelles les expériences et les systèmes ont échoué et dont on se borne à limiter les ravages.*” (Duchatelet, vol. ii. p. 525.)

It is a common mistake with many excellent men, to suppose that, because any action is wicked and mischievous, it necessarily follows that it is desirable to proceed against it by legal means, or forcible repression. Law is not omnipotent, and force is often very weak. To attack the consequence instead of the cause, is the error of the indolent, the hasty, and the violent. All experience has shown that you cannot, by enactment, prevent *any* demand from being met by an adequate supply. A lesson—which might be salutary were we a people given to profit by the experience of our past failures—may be learnt from a glance at the results of our proceeding in a case not very dissimilar from the one we are now considering. Towards the end of the last century, the enormities of the slave trade aroused the attention of Englishmen. It was shown that, apart from the sin involved in the very idea of such a traffic, thousands of the unhappy negroes perished in their forced voyage across the Atlantic, in consequence of inadequate accommodation in the trading vessels, and an insufficient supply of water. Mr. Wilberforce's first step was a wise one. He procured an enactment, not

to forbid the trade, but to *regulate the number of slaves per tonnage* that each vessel was allowed to carry, and to enforce a fixed number of gallons of water being provided for the use of each. *So far the evil of the trade was mitigated.* But his zeal did not allow him to stop here. After inducing the legislature to prohibit the traffic to all British subjects (which we assuredly find no fault with), he induced our government to adopt that system of armed repression, which, in spite of repeated demonstration of its evils, has ever since been obstinately maintained. The consequence—the inevitable consequence—has been (since the demand for slaves is so great that slaves *will* be had), that our squadron, by compelling the slave traders to use smaller and swifter vessels, and to pack their living cargoes into closer and closer compass, has augmented their sufferings to a degree which it is appalling to contemplate, and absolutely wicked to persist in causing.

“It has been proved,” says Mr. Buxton,\* “by documents that cannot be controverted, that for every village fired, and for every drove of human beings marched in former days, there are now double. For every cargo then at sea, two cargoes wedged together in a mass of living corruption, are now borne on the waves of the Atlantic. But while the numbers who suffer have increased, there is no reason to believe that the sufferings of each have abated; on the contrary, we know that in some particulars these have increased; so that the sum total of misery swells in both ways. Each individual has more to endure, and the number of individuals is twice what it was. The result therefore is, that aggravated suffering reaches multiplied numbers.”

Mr. Buxton and subsequent witnesses have proved, with a degree of clearness which leaves no room for doubt, that our attempts to repress the slave traffic by an armed force are not only in a great measure answerable for its *increase* (since more must now be *embarked* in order that the same number may *arrive*), but have actually been the *cause* of its having quadrupled in suffering and atrocity—by those changes in the construction of their vessels, and in the mode of embarking their cargo, which the vigilance of our cruisers has compelled the slavers to adopt, in order to avoid capture and detection.

The retrospect is pregnant with instruction. And it is to be feared that those who hope, by suppressing brothels, to extinguish prostitution, will find that they, like their fellow-philanthropists, have merely changed its localities (perhaps for the worse), and increased its intrinsic evil by shrouding it in still darker concealment. To endeavour forcibly to cut off the supply of prostitutes while the demand for them continues unchecked, must be futile, as both

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\* ‘The Slave Trade, and its Remedy.’

experience and reasoning might teach us. Moreover, it is beginning at the wrong end. Let us endeavour, by well considered and appropriate means, to sap the mischief in its source; and content ourselves, in the meantime, with such measures as may mitigate the evils which flow from it, so long as it shall continue to exist.

Since, then, we are obliged to come to the conclusion that it is unadvisable, as a general rule, to adopt repressive measures against prostitution and fornication, when practised by persons of mature age, it remains to be considered whether this general rule ought not to be departed from when public decency is outraged, or the public health endangered. That breaches of external decorum, of a nature to meet and shock the general eye, should be repressed promptly and efficiently by the strong arm of the law, as offences against society, may be considered as an undisputed matter, into which we need not enter. But whether the frightful injury to public health, which results from unchecked and unsupervised prostitution—an injury compared with which the ravages of plague, cholera, and influenza (against which we have multiplied sanitary precautions), are of light importance—is not such as to call for administrative interference; this is a question still undetermined. Up to the present moment the English have decided in the negative, and the French, and most continental nations, in the affirmative. If public health is an affair which at all merits the attention of the government, or lies within its proper functions,—if the late movement of popular feeling in favour of sanitary measures be not wholly a mistake, and a step in the wrong direction,—if compulsory vaccination of paupers,—if quarantine regulations against imported pestilence,—if enforced cleanliness in times of cholera visitation,—be justifiable and right, then the natural *à priori*, *à fortiori* conclusion unquestionably is, that it is an imperative duty on the administrative authorities to take all needful and feasible measures to check the spread of a malady more general, more constantly present, and more terrible than all other epidemics. There may, however, we are well aware, be considerations of public morals, or of general expediency, which over-ride even considerations of public health. Let us, therefore, weigh dispassionately the objections commonly urged against any attempt to check and eradicate the spread of syphilitic poison through our population, by such regulation and supervision of prostitutes as shall prevent them from practising their *métier* when diseased.

The first objection we shall dispose of very cavalierly. We are told that such supervision and interference would be an infringement of the liberty of the subject. To this we shall content ourselves with replying, that no law and no society recognises in individuals a degree of liberty incompatible with the welfare and the rights of

others; that in all civilised states the acknowledged boundary of the freedom of each citizen is the well-being of the community of which he forms a part; and that the same rule of natural law which justifies the officer in shooting a plague-stricken sufferer who breaks through a *cordon sanitaire*, justifies him in arresting and confining the syphilitic prostitute who, if not arrested, would spread infection all around her.

A second, and a more rational objection is, that the fear of the maladies communicated by prostitutes acts as a powerful motive in restraining men from frequenting them; that if fornication were attended with no risk to health, the young would indulge in it far more freely and unreservedly than they dare to do at present; and that, in short, it is very desirable that the sin should be kept in check by the knowledge that, in all likelihood, it will carry its own punishment along with it. This, however, is scarcely language that will be held by any but mere recluse reasoners. For two hundred and fifty years, since the middle of the sixteenth century when this malady first appeared, prostitutes have been allowed to spread infection on all sides of them without control. Let us (argues M. Duchatelet) read the history of this long period; let us open the numberless volumes published during it respecting the venereal disease; let us consult those who can remember the state of the matter at the close of the last century; and we shall find that the fear of the most horrible consequences has never produced any effect in deterring men from fornication; that persons of violent passions and irregular appetites have always, as now, frequented public women, though disease and even death stared them in the face. Again, do we, as a matter of fact, find that fornication is at all more general or more daring in those countries where sanitary regulations against syphilis have succeeded in mitigating its virulence and its dangers, than in those where its ravages are left unchecked? Is it at all more prevalent in Paris than in London?—in Vienna than in Liverpool or New York?

But a yet more weighty consideration remains behind. If the libertine were the only one injured by the indulgence of his libertinage—if the sinner were the only sufferer—much might be said in favour of allowing the penalties of nature to take their course. But this is far from being the case: the children of men who have undergone the venereal disease, in any virulence, are often diseased themselves, and always, more or less, constitutionally injured; for it is absurd to suppose that a poison of this nature can ever be eradicated without permanent damage to the health; and the seeds of deterioration are thus widely sown throughout the race, as physicians and physiologists are too well aware. Moreover, the profligate who frequents abandoned women, does not always confine

himself to such ; the infection which he draws from them he may pass on to the modest and deserving. Married men—the fact is as notorious as it is grievous—are, in numberless instances, regular frequenters of brothels, and by their means syphilis is introduced into the bosom of families ; and the most virtuous women, and the most innocent children, in this way become the victims. How frequent, in all ranks, these sad cases are, none but medical men can inform us ; and, we believe, they will be among the last to underrate the extensive ramifications of this deplorable mischief.

Finally, it is urged that the “tacit sanction” given to vice by such a *recognition* of prostitution as would be involved in a system of supervision, registration, or license, would be a greater evil than all the maladies (moral and physical) which now flow from its unchecked prevalence. But let it be considered that by ignoring, we do not abolish it ; we do not even conceal it ; it speaks aloud ; it walks abroad ; it is a vice as patent and as well known as drunkenness ; it is already “tacitly sanctioned” by the mere fact of its permitted or connived-at existence—by the very circumstance which stares us in the face, that the legislative and executive authorities, seeing it, deploring it, yet confess by their inaction their inability to check it, and their unwillingness to prohibit it, and virtually say to the unfortunate prostitutes and their frequenters—“As long as you create no public scandal, but throw a decent veil over your proceedings, we shall not interfere with you, but shall regard you as an inevitable evil.” By an attempt to regulate and control them, the authorities would confess nothing more than they already in act acknowledge—viz., their desire to mitigate an evil which they have discovered their incompetency to suppress. By prohibiting the practice of prostitution *under certain conditions*, they do not legalize or authorize it under all other conditions ; they simply announce that, *under these certain conditions*, they feel called upon promptly to interfere. The legislature does not forbid drunkenness, knowing that it would be futile to do so ; but if a man, when drunk, is disorderly, pugnacious, or indecent, or in any other mode compromises public comfort or public morals, it steps forward to arrest and punish him ; yet, surely, by no fair use of words can it be represented as thereby *sanctioning* drunkenness when unaccompanied by indecorous or riotous behaviour. It merely declares that in the one case interference falls within its functions, and that in the other case it does not. Likewise, in the parallel case under consideration, such legislative interference as we suggest would merely hold this clear, sound, intelligible language :—“Prostitution *per se* is a sin against taste, morals, and religion ; but it is one of those vices, like bad temper, hatred, malice, and covetousness, which, however noxious, it is not a part of the duty of government

actively to repress or punish : the propagation of syphilis is an overt act of public mischief, a crime committed against society, which it clearly falls within their province to prevent."

"Je terminerai" (says M. Duchatelet) "ces considérations par un supposition : si aujourd'hui tous les cabarets de Paris fabriquaient de mauvais vin ; s'il était à la connaissance du public que ce vin contient un poison lent ; si les rues étaient remplies d'ivrognes et la ville de maladies contagieuses ; si, malgré tous ces avertissements, ce public avait un goût tellement décidé pour cette boisson, que ni la honte, ni les reproches ni les plus graves châtimens ne pussent l'empêcher d'en faire usage, que dirait-on d'un homme qui trouverait le moyen de purifier ce vin, et d'en rendre l'usage moins pernicieux, même pour les intempérans ? Ne lui adresserait-on pas des louanges ?—quelqu'un s'aviserait-il de soutenir qu'il fait une mauvaise action en empêchant les gens sensuels et sans prévoyance d'être empoisonnés ? Eh bien ! l'administration se trouve dans le même cas vis-à-vis de la prostitution."—Vol. ii. p. 47.

One word more on this subject. We cannot imagine that any one can seriously suppose that prostitution would be made either more generally attractive or respectable, by the greater decency and decorum which administrative supervision would compel it to throw over its externals. We know that the absence of these does not deter men of irregular passions from the low pursuit ; and we know, moreover, that wherever these are needed for the behoof of a more scrupulous and refined class of fornicators, they are to be found. We are convinced, also, that much of the permanent ruin to the feelings and character which results from the habit of visiting the haunts of prostitution, is to be attributed to the coarse language and the brutal manners which prevail there ; and that this vice, like many others, would lose much of its evil by losing all of grossness that is separable from it. Nor do we fear that the improvement in the *tone* of prostitution which would thus result, would render its unhappy victims less anxious to escape from it. Soften its horrors and gild its loathsomeness as you may, there will always remain enough to revolt all who are not wholly lost. Much, too—everything almost—is gained if you can retain *any* degree of self-respect among the fallen : the more of this that remains, the greater chance is there of ultimate redemption ; it is always a mistaken and a cruel policy to allow vice to grow desperate and reckless. It is for the interest of society at large, as well as for that of the guilty individual, that we should never break down the bridge behind any sinner.

We have now cleared the way for the consideration of the means to which we should look with hope for the diminution and mitigation of prostitution ; and as our function is suggestive, and not legislative, we shall indicate these as concisely as we can.



1. There can be no doubt that such a rectification of social anomalies—such a general amelioration in our social condition, as should place the means of earning an ample livelihood by honourable industry within the reach of women of all classes, would at once remove one of the most prolific of those sources whence prostitutes are supplied. We have seen how often poverty drives women to a vicious mode of life ; and this class of victims would be rescued by such an improvement in the position of the mass of our population as we may dream of and toil for, but cannot, for generations at least, hope to see. But the means by which such a result can be obtained, present far too wide a subject for us to enter upon here. Nor must we be too sanguine in anticipating a very great diminution of prostitution from this cause alone ; for in the United States, where the sexes are equal in the eye of the law, and the means of an ample maintenance are within reach of all (as far as the most favourable combination of circumstances can secure such a result), we find the vice far from rare. Statistics are unattainable, and the statements of writers differ widely. One American authority estimates the number of abandoned women in New York alone at upwards of 12,000 ; this is probably an exaggeration. Wakefield and De Tocqueville give exactly opposite opinions ; but both seem to argue from what they suppose *must* be, rather than from what they know actually *is* the case. The former says :—"In America the demand for women of the town is very small ; and such as it is, arises principally from the sojourn of foreigners in sea-port towns ; but if that demand were doubled by a sufficient increase of foreign visitors, it would not be supplied, because in America every girl can readily obtain an honest livelihood." The French writer, on the other hand, declares that the very causes which secure virtuous women from seduction will necessarily increase the number of courtezans, by rendering that the only mode of illicit intercourse attainable.

2. The details we have given in an earlier part of this paper, will show how much might be done by better and ampler house accommodation for the poor. As long as both sexes herd together in bed rooms, the barriers of modesty will be broken down too early in life to admit of their acting as bulwarks of virtue when the day of temptation shall arrive. Much good has been already effected by the amount of public attention which has been turned in this direction ; the houses now erected for the manufacturing population are of a very superior description, affording always two, and frequently three, bed rooms ; and a few benevolent proprietors in the agricultural districts are following the example. This is one of the channels into which public charity may be turned, with the greatest hope of good and the least risk of evil ; *nuclei* of good examples

are being gradually scattered up and down the country, and in a few years we shall expect to trace a marked and general improvement.

3. The common lodging-houses of the metropolis, and of most great towns, are among the worst sinks of iniquity and nurseries of prostitution that exist. These should be brought at once under the control of the police, not for the sake of suppression, but of surveillance and regulation: in these cases, as in that of brothels, suppression merely means closer concealment and removal into worse localities. The following extracts from Mr. Mayhew's letters to the *Morning Chronicle* will suffice to give an idea of the frightful wretchedness of these abodes.

"A good-looking girl of sixteen gave me the following awful statement. Her hands were swollen with cold:—

"I am an orphan. When I was ten I was sent to service as maid-of-all-work, in a small tradesman's family. It was a hard place, and my mistress used me very cruelly, beating me often. When I had been in place three weeks, my mother died; my father having died twelve years before. I stood my mistress's ill-treatment for about six months. She beat me with sticks as well as with her hands. I was black and blue, and at last I ran away. I got to Mrs.—, a low lodging-house. I didn't know before that there was such a place. I heard of it from some girls at the Glasshouse (baths and washhouses), where I went for shelter. I went with them to have a halfpenny-worth of coffee, and they took me to the lodging-house. I then had three shillings, and stayed about a month, and did nothing wrong, living on the three shillings and what I pawned my clothes for, as I got some pretty good things away with me. In the lodging-house I saw nothing but what was bad, and heard nothing but what was bad. I was laughed at, and was told to swear. They said, "Look at her for a d— modest fool"—sometimes worse than that, until by degrees I got to be as bad as they were. During this time I used to see boys and girls from ten and twelve years old sleeping together, but understood nothing wrong. I had never heard of such places before I ran away. I can neither read or write. My mother was a good woman, and I wish I'd had her to run away to. I saw things between almost children that I can't describe to you—very often I saw them, and that shocked me. At the month's end, when I was beat out, I met with a young man of fifteen—I myself was going on to twelve years old—and he persuaded me to take up with him. I stayed with him three months in the same lodging-house, living with him as his wife, though we were mere children, and being true to him. At the three month's end he was taken up for picking pockets, and got six months. I was sorry, for he was kind to me; though I was made ill through him; so I broke some windows in St. Paul's Churchyard to get into prison to get cured. I had a month in the Compter, and came out well. I was scolded very much in the Compter, on account of the state I was in, being so young. I had 2s. 6d. given to me when I came out, and was forced to go into the streets

for a living. I continued walking the streets for three years, sometimes making a good deal of money, sometimes none, feasting one day and starving the next. The bigger girls could persuade me to do anything they liked with my money. I was never happy all the time, but I could get no character and could not get out of the life. I lodged all this time at a lodging-house in Kent-street. They were all thieves and bad girls. I have known between three and four dozen boys and girls sleep in one room. The beds were horrid filthy and full of vermin. There was very wicked carryings on. The boys, if any difference, was the worst. We lay packed on a full night, a dozen boys and girls squeezed into one bed. That was very often the case—some at the foot and some at the top—boys and girls all mixed. I can't go into all the particulars, but whatever could take place in words or acts between boys and girls did take place, and in the midst of the others. I am sorry to say I took part in these bad ways myself, but I wasn't so bad as some of the others. There was only a candle burning all night, but in summer it was light great part of the night. Some boys and girls slept without any clothes, and would dance about the room that way. I have seen them, and, wicked as I was, felt ashamed. I have seen two dozen capering about the room that way; some mere children—the boys generally the youngest. There were no men or women present. There were often fights. The deputy never interfered. 'This is carried on just the same as ever to this day, and is the same every night. I have heard young girls shout out to one another how often they had been obliged to go to the hospital, or the infirmary, or the workhouse. There was a great deal of boasting about what the boys and girls had stolen during the day. I have known boys and girls change their 'partners,' just for a night. At three years' end I stole a piece of beef from a butcher. I did it to get into prison. I was sick of the life I was leading, and didn't know how to get out of it. I had a month for stealing. When I got out I passed two days and a night in the streets doing nothing wrong, and then went and threatened to break Messrs.——— windows again. I did that to get into prison again; for when I lay quiet of a night in prison I thought things over, and considered what a shocking life I was leading, and how my health might be ruined completely, and I thought I would stick to prison rather than go back to such a life. I got six months for threatening. When I got out I broke a lamp for the same purpose, and had a fortnight. That was the last time I was in prison. I have since been leading the same life as I told you of for three years, and lodging at the same houses, and seeing the same goings on. I hate such a life now more than ever. I am willing to do any work that I can in washing and cleaning. Anybody may call in the daytime at this house and have a halfpennyworth of coffee, and sit any length of time until evening. I have seen three dozen sitting there that way, all thieves and bad girls. There are no chairs and only one form in front of the fire, on which a dozen can sit. The others sit on the floor all about the room, as near the fire as they can. Bad language goes on during the day, as I have told you it did during the night, and indecen-

cies too, but nothing like so bad as at night. They talk about where there is good places to go and thief. The missionaries call sometimes, but they're laughed at often when they're talking, and always before the door's closed on them. If a decent girl goes there to get a ha'porth of coffee, seeing the board over the door, she is always shocked. Many a poor girl has been ruined in this house since I was, and boys have boasted about it. I never knew boy or girl do good, once get used there. Get used there, indeed, and you are life-ruined. I was an only child, and haven't a friend in the world. I have heard several girls say how they would like to get out of the life, and out of the place. From those I know, I think that cruel parents and mistresses cause many to be driven there. One lodging-house keeper, Mrs.—, goes out dressed respectable, and pawns any stolen property, or sells it at public-houses.'

"To show the actual state of these lodging-houses from the testimony of one who has been long resident in them, I give the following statement. It was made to me by a man of superior education and intelligence (as the tone of his narrative fully shows), whom circumstances, which do not affect the object of my present letter, and therefore need not be detailed, had reduced from affluence to beggary, so that he was compelled to be the constant inmate of those places. All the other statements that I obtained on the subject—and they were numerous—were corroborative of his account to the very letter:—

"I have been familiar, unfortunately for me, with low lodging-houses, both in town and country, for more than ten years. I consider that, as to the conduct of these places, it is worse in London than in the country—while in the country the character of the keeper is worse than in London, although but a small difference can be noted. The worst I am acquainted with, though I haven't been in it lately, is in the neighbourhood of Drury-lane—this is the worst, both for filth and for the character of the lodgers. In the room where I slept, which was like a barn in size, the tiles were off the roof, and as there was no ceiling, I could see the blue sky from where I lay. That may be altered now. Here I slept in what was called the single men's room, and it was confined to men. In another part of the house was a room for married couples, as it was called; but of such apartments I can tell you more concerning other houses. For the bed with the view of the blue sky I paid 3*d*. If it rained there was no shelter. I have slept in a room in Brick-lane, Whitechapel, in which were fourteen beds. In the next bed to me, on the one side, was a man, his wife, and three children, and a man and his wife on the other. They were Irish people, and I believe the women were the men's wives—as the Irish women generally are. Of all the women that resort to these places, the Irish are far the best for chastity. All the beds were occupied, single men being mixed with the couples of the two sexes. The question is never asked, when a man and woman go to a lodging-house, if they are man and wife. All must pay before they go to bed, or be turned into the street. These beds were made—as all the low lodging-house beds are—of the worst cotton flocks, stuffed in course, strong canvas. There is a pair of sheets, a blanket,

and a rug. I have known the bedding to be unchanged for three months; but that is not general. The beds are an average size. Dirt is the rule with them, and cleanliness the exception. They are all infested with vermin. I never met with an exception. No one is required to wash before going to bed in any of these places (except at a very few, where a very dirty fellow would not be admitted), unless he has been walking on a wet day without shoes or stockings, and then he must bathe his feet. The people who slept in the room I am describing, were chiefly young men, almost all accompanied by young females. I have seen girls of fifteen sleep with "their chaps"—in some places with youths of from sixteen to twenty. There is no objection to any boy or girl occupying a bed, even though the keeper knows that they were previously strangers to each other. The accommodation for purposes of decency is very bad in some places. A pail in the middle of the room, to which both sexes may resort, is a frequent arrangement. No delicacy or decency is ever observed. The women are, I think, worse than the men. If any one, possessing a sense of shame, says a word of rebuke, he is at once assailed, by the women in particular, with the coarsest words in the language. The Irish women are as bad as the others with respect to language; but I have known them keep themselves covered in bed when the other women were outraging modesty or decency. The Irish will sleep anywhere to save a half-penny a night, if they have ever so much money.' [Here he stated certain gross acts common to lodging-houses, which cannot be detailed in print.] 'It is not uncommon for a boy or a man to take a girl out of the streets to these apartments. Some are the same as common brothels, women being taken in at all hours of the day or night. In most, however, they must stay all night as a married couple. In dressing or undressing there is no regard to decency; while disgusting blackguardism is often carried on in the conversation of the inmates. I have known decent people, those that are driven to such places from destitution, perhaps for the first time, shocked and disgusted at what they saw. I have seen a decent married pair so shocked and disgusted, that they have insisted on leaving the place, and have left it.' "

4. Another measure, the urgency of which has been strongly forced upon our minds during the course of our inquiries, is the establishment throughout the country of an adequate number of asylums for those poor girls who wish either to escape from a life of prostitution, or to avoid having recourse to it. The numbers who might annually be saved or rescued by such institutions must have been made clear to any one who has gone through the evidence we have presented to them. Private benevolence has already exerted itself to some extent in this direction; but, as will be seen, its efforts have been in no way commensurate with the magnitude of the evil. The following summary is from the pen of Mr. Talbot, Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Young Females,

whose asylum at Tottenham has already received 472 of these unfortunate women.

"The Magdalen Hospital was founded in 1758, and up to January 1844, has received 6,968 females. Of this number 4,752 have been reconciled to their friends, placed in service, or in other respectable and industrious situations; 107 have been lunatic, troubled with fits, or incurable disorders; 109 have died; 1,185 discharged at their own request; 720 discharged for improper behaviour; two absconded, and 96 remained in the house.

"The Lock Asylum was founded in 1787, for the reception of penitent female patients, when discharged from the Lock Hospital. Up to Lady-day 1837, the number of women received was 984, of whom 170 have been received by their friends; 281 gone to service; 22 have died in the house, and 18 remained there in 1837.

"The London Female Penitentiary was instituted in 1807. Since that time, out of 6,939 *applicants*, 2,717 have been admitted into the house; of whom 1,543 have been placed out to service, reconciled and restored to their friends, or otherwise provided for; 350 have left at their own request; 479 discharged from various causes: 23 sent to their parishes; 47 emigrated to Van Dieman's Land; 28 have died, and 95 remained in 1843.

"The Guardian Society was established in 1812; and since that period 1,932 wretched outcasts have partaken of the advantages of the institution; 455 have been placed in service, or satisfactorily provided for; 533 restored to their friends; 53 sent to their respective parishes; 842 have been discharged, or withdrawn; 17 have died, and 31 are now under the care of the institution.

"Besides these institutions, others have been established, having similar objects in view, viz.:—The British Penitent Female Refuge; the Female Mission; the South London Penitentiary, and one or two others. As compared with the great numbers of unfortunate women in London, these institutions have effected but a very small amount of good. During 77 years, ending 1835, 10,005 females were received within the walls of four of the London Penitentiaries; out of which number, 6,262 were satisfactorily provided for, and 2,980 discharged for misconduct. Taking the whole of the institutions in London, up to the present time, it may be fairly estimated that no more than 14,000 or 15,000 unfortunate women, have had the opportunity of returning to a virtuous life.

"Almost every large town in the country has its Magdalen Institution; and in some extensive places, two or three are to be found. Unhappily, all Magdalen Institutions are but very feebly supported; and in reference to most of them, it may be said that they are in a languishing condition. The public mind has not yet been sufficiently impressed with the magnitude and importance of the subject; hence the little countenance given to the efforts put forth for the benefit of poor and degraded women."

To meet the want of which we are treating, it has been suggested that suitable asylums for females who have been, or are on the brink of becoming prostitutes, shall be established by the authority of law in every parish, and shall be supported by public or parochial funds. Without giving in our adhesion to so comprehensive a scheme—without affecting blindness to the very dangerous abuses which might possibly follow from its adoption—we still think that, under certain modifications, it is worthy of all attention. We think it highly desirable that the experiment should be tried in one locality, and on a limited scale. We earnestly desire to see such asylums established in adequate numbers and suitable situations, for the metropolis at least. In order to obviate the fatal abuses which would otherwise certainly creep in, the greatest care and the strictest regulations would be necessary to prevent such institutions from becoming refuges for the *generally* destitute—ready homes for those who could not, or would not, find employment sufficient to support them. The asylums should be made as nearly as possible self-supporting; the strictest industry and regularity of conduct should be enforced upon the inmates; and a rigid separation should be enforced between the penitent and the yet unfallen. *It would further be essential that these institutions should not be left to the blunders, or the ebbing and flowing zeal, of benevolent amateurs;* they must be under public and official management. If these points be steadily kept in view, we believe that the good effected by such asylums would be incalculable, and that the collateral evils might be reduced to a very insignificant amount. The objections which would be urged on the score of expense, we are disposed to treat very lightly. When we reflect on the vast sums annually lavished in the maintainance of paupers, and on the support, safe custody, moral discipline, and personal comfort of criminals of every shade, we do not doubt that society can afford, and will not grudge, whatever further expenditure may be requisite to rescue the repentant, or to save the tempted who yet struggle in the unequal contest. If the juvenile thief is a fit subject for costly care, reformatory discipline, and a “fair trial” in the colonies, surely the juvenile prostitute is yet more so. And if it is desirable to afford a way of reform and retrogression to the repentant criminal, surely it is yet more so to hold out a helping hand in time, to those who are already trembling on the brink of the abyss, but recoil from the last step with horror.

5. We would recommend the appointment of a special department connected with the Board of Health, whose duty it should be—with due safeguard against the abuse of their powers—to take all needful and feasible measures to prevent the spread of syphilitic infection. What these measures should be, would be a question

demanding the most cautious and searching investigation. Probably the first which would approve themselves would be the establishment by authority of a sufficient number of Lock Hospitals, and the subjecting all prostitutes (whose haunts and persons would in time become accurately known to them) to a periodical medical inspection, with the prompt sequestration or removal to the hospital of all who were found diseased. This measure might in time be followed up by extending the power of these special officers to the arrest and imprisonment of all prostitutes who should be found practising their occupation without certificate that they had undergone such medical inspection within a given time. We purposely abstain from entering into any further details as to the precautionary measures which this department of the Board of Health might find it necessary to adopt; the establishment of such a department being the point on which the public is, in the first instance, called upon to decide. Without it, we think all will agree there is no possibility of placing any check to the spread of venereal disease.

The measures above indicated will, to a certain extent—probably to a great extent—mitigate the evil of prostitution, and diminish the number of its victims: for anything beyond mitigation we must trust to the slow operation of moral influences. Mere preaching against the vice of fornication has not been so fruitful of success hitherto, as to justify us in anticipating much from its efficacy in future. Public opinion—that general *résumé* of the judgment of the great bulk of educated society, which is so omnipotent with most men, which with too many is the sole guide and the sole check they acknowledge—must undergo considerable modification and enlightenment, before much diminution of prostitution can be looked for. Towards such modification we have here contributed our mite. Towards such modification ethical writers may do something; writers of fiction may do much; the silent and unostentatious efforts of those sensible and right-minded men of the world, who give the tone to general society, may do far more; women, by demurring to unite themselves with men notoriously and habitually guilty of this vulgar vice, might probably do most of all. There are especially three points on which, if the notions and feelings of the public at large could be rectified, prostitution would be reduced to a minimum. On two of these we have already expressed our views.

The first is, that purchased and promiscuous embraces—the frequentation of women who sell their caresses to any comer—should be considered (*voted*, if you will have the broad word) low, vulgar, and unworthy of a gentleman. That it is so, no one conversant with the language and conduct customary among this class of women—no one with a clear perception of what gentlemanly tastes and feelings demand—will feel disposed to deny. The wonder



is, that there has ever arisen a different state of opinion. If a sound tone of refinement on this head could be recovered,—if the habit of visiting prostitutes could be made a thing which gentlemen were ashamed to *admit to each other*,—if the great truth which we ventured to lay down in the early part of this paper were boldly announced and reiterated by all who acknowledge its correctness, viz., that the severance of the sexual embrace from the love which alone justifies it, which alone should prompt it, which alone rescues it from the lowness of a mere animal appetite, is a sin against nature, —then the victory over evil would be already half accomplished; fornication would become vulgar by being regarded as such, and would descend to a lower and a lower class of society, till it was pushed out of existence altogether, or was confined to the ruffian and the criminal alone.

The second point is, that society should recur to a sounder and more merciful judgment of female frailty; that the first false step (which on the woman's part is often generosity, and generally only weakness) should no longer be considered irretrievable; that it should no longer close to her all sources of maintenance save such as infamy can furnish; that as it does not indicate, so it should no longer be held to necessitate, depravity. If the same harsh rule which we now apply to the weaker, were applied to the stronger and the guiltier sex; if the tempter were judged as inexorably as the tempted; if young men, who commit one act of unchastity, were compelled to feel that all their prospects in life were in consequence blighted for ever, and that their position was lost, hopelessly and irrecoverably—society would be infested with, and almost made up of, desperadoes. We do not argue for the application to them of a sterner code than, in the present condition of human progress, could be borne; but reason and religion are alike outraged when the sinner himself assumes a language of Rhadamanthine severity, which would sit ill upon the purest ermine, and pronounces the very same guilt which is held trivial and venial in him, to be unpardonable and irreparable in the more guileless accomplice whom he has led astray. While weak women are made to feel that the laws of chastity cannot be violated with impunity,—and on this point nature and conscience provide an inexorable Nemesis,—let them also feel that, in the case of this sin, as in that of every other, sincere repentance is next to innocence, and that diligent atonement may redeem the past. Till virtuous women and reflecting men can be persuaded to modify their verdict on the matter, much of the existing prostitution will lie at their door.

The third needed change in social ethics is this: that the *deserter*—not the seducer—shall be branded with the same kind and degree of reprobation with which society now visits the coward and the

cheat. The man who submits to insult rather than fight; the gambler who packs the cards, or loads the dice, or refuses to pay his debts of honour; is hunted from among even his unscrupulous associates as a stained and tarnished character. *Let the same measure of retributive justice be dealt to the seducer who deserts the woman who has trusted him, and allows her to come upon the town.* We say the deserter—not the seducer; for there is as wide a distinction between them as there is between the gamester and the sharper. Mere seduction will never be visited with extreme severity among men of the world, however correct and refined may be their general tone of morals; for they will always make large allowances on the score of youthful passions, favouring circumstances, and excited feeling. Moreover, they well know that there is a wide distinction—that there are all degrees of distinction—between a man who commits a fault of this kind under the influence of warm affections and a fiery temperament, and the cold-hearted systematic assailer of female virtue, whom all reprobate and shun. It is universally felt that you cannot, with any justice, class these men in the same category, nor mete out to them the same measure of condemnation. But the man who, when his caprice is satisfied, casts off his victim as a worn-out garment, or a damaged toy; who allows the woman who trusted his protestations, reciprocated his caresses, shared his joys, lay in his bosom, resigned herself to him, in short,

“In all the trusting helplessness of love,”

to sink from the position of his mistress to the loathsome life of prostitution, because his seduction and desertion has left no other course open to her—who is not ready to make any sacrifice of peace, of fortune, of reputation even, in order to save one whom he has once loved from such an abyss of wretched infamy,—must surely be more stained, soiled, and hardened in soul, more utterly unfitted for the company or the sympathies of gentlemen or men of honour—than *any* coward, *any* gambler, *any* cheat!

There are those—and some such cases are on record—who have met in after years at the corners of ill-famed streets, and have recognised by the light which streamed from the windows of the neighbouring gin-shop, her whom in youthful days they had first led astray from innocence, and then lightly or brutally deserted; and they have described the horror and remorse which seized them as they gazed upon the wreck before them, and listened to the obscene language, the drunken oaths, the ruffianly curses, which now issued from the lips to which they had taught the first soft whispers of illicit love, and contemplated the thick darkness which had now closed over the soul, the first cloud upon whose summer day was due to their unholy solicitations. To men not dead to all

feeling, such a meeting must be a punishment almost adequate to their offences. Yet such consequences every deserter voluntarily encounters. We well know the ordinary pleas by which men seek to justify such desertion. We well know that remorse often makes these poor victims fretful, capricious, and unattractive; we know that they often become, as it is natural they should, extravagant, jealous, and exacting. But every man endowed with common feelings of justice or honour, must avow to himself, that when he asked his mistress to give up everything to him, he gave her a claim upon him which nothing subsequent could cancel, which no after unreasonableness on her part could permit him to shake off. He bound himself to be her protector, if not her companion, through life; and, as far as his utmost power extended, to stand between her and all the consequences which, for his sake, she had been induced to brave. To shrink from the performance of his part of the tacit, or the asseverated compact, because he has ceased to value the purchase, or has repented of the bargain, is surely equivalent in dishonour to any of those acts by which a man's social reputation is now irretrievably forfeited.

When once the morality of the world has recovered a healthy tone on this subject, and desertion is branded as unmanly and dishonourable, seduction will become comparatively rare; for men will be chary of contracting obligations which they feel must cling to them for ever. All men will feel then, as the ingenuous and kind-hearted feel now, how sad a mistake it is to suppose that the chains of illicit love are at all lighter or weaker than those of more public and legitimate connexions. "It never happens," says one of our chief novelists, "to a man of just and honourable feeling, to make a woman wholly dependent on himself, and to shut on her the gates of the world, without his discovering, sooner or later, that he has not only encumbered his conscience, but has more effectually crippled his liberty, and more deeply implicated his peace, than by all the embarrassments of the Church."

THE END







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